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Page 30.

A "LEAL, LIGHT HEART"

BY

ANNETTE LYSTER,

AUTHOR OF

"NORTH WIND AND SUNSHINE," "MRS. DOBBS' DULL BOY,"
'THE PIANO IN THE ATTIC,' "CHRYSSIE'S HERO," "MY LONELY LASSIE,"
"FAN'S SILKEN STRING," "THE INVASION OF IVYLANDS," ETC.

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A "LEAL, LIGHT HEART."



CHAPTER I.

LADY LE MESURIER.

SOMEWHERE in England there is a Cathedral town which in this story I shall call Fairminster, and near that town, there is a very pretty residence called Moorside House. In this house lived, when the present century was only middle-aged, a lady; who, though a little older than the century, and though her own history was rather uneventful, was yet the direct cause of this history being written. For a few months before the day on which my story begins, the young people who figure therein believed most sincerely that their lot in life was all arranged, and that they knew exactly what it was to be, and all about it;—but

they found that they had reckoned without Fate, and Lady Le Mesurier !

Lady Le Mesurier was the widow of the last dean of Fairminster, and her friend, Mrs. Appleby, was the widow of the last but one. And one Thursday evening, in the month of October, these two ladies were sitting in the drawing-room of Moorside House, chatting comfortably over the affairs, dress, appearance and ~~deparment~~ of the twenty or thirty ladies and gentlemen who not long before had been sitting in the same room, drinking tea and coffee, and otherwise enjoying themselves. For Lady Le Mesurier was "at home" on Thursday from three o'clock to six, and being a most popular personage, never wanted for visitors.

The friends, sitting one on each side of the fire, were curiously contrasted in appearance. Lady Le Mesurier, who was a woman of good birth, and overwhelmingly proud of it, was tall and graceful, and looked like a "personage,"—as truly, in Fairminster and the neighbourhood, she was. She had been very handsome, and still possessed fine blue eyes, abundant grey hair and remarkably fine teeth ; but the eyes and the hair were her own,—indeed, so were the teeth, for she always paid her dentist's charges at once. She was beautifully dressed, and the lace of her cap was something unique. Mrs. Appleby, who was a "nobody" by

birth, was a stout, short, square woman, with a snub nose and twinkling tiny black eyes. She was dressed in black, and her bonnet looked as if she had accidentally sat upon it: and to crown all, while Lady Le Mesurier was universally admitted to be "perfectly charming," Mrs. Appleby enjoyed the reputation of being the rudest woman in the world, with a love of contradiction which almost amounted to a monomania. Every one wondered why "dear Lady Le Mesurier liked *that* Mrs. Appleby"—how they had ever become intimate, and when the intimacy would end in a quarrel,—for dear Lady Le Mesurier was known to be no meek and lamb-like creature when annoyed. But the friendship had lasted now for many years, and people were tired of waiting for the quarrel. The truth was, the ladies were very useful to one another. Lady Le Mesurier loved to know all that was going on, and was too proud to gossip with her maid. Mrs. Appleby always knew everything (some said "a good deal more"), and would question and cross-question her milk-boy, postman, or even the crossing-sweeper, sooner than fail to acquaint herself with full particulars of every bit of news. All the intelligence thus gathered was faithfully carried to Lady Le Mesurier, and Mrs. Appleby never told any one that her friend cared to hear it: a piece of reticence which had its

reward. Mrs. Appleby was of a saving turn, and owing to her friendship with the mistress of Moor-side she seldom had to buy either fruit or vegetables; indeed, since her second daughter's marriage she had very nearly lived at Lady Le Mesurier's expense.

"I thought Mrs. Eustace was looking ill to-day," said Lady Le Mesurier, in her low, distinct voice.

"Quite as well as usual, to my mind," replied the somewhat shrill accents of Mrs. Appleby. "It was only the reflection of that green velvet bonnet. That a woman with a face like a lemon should wear a green bonnet!"

"Have you heard anything more, Janet, of that poor fellow Tom? He was the one I always liked best. Do they know where he is?"

"I rather think he is in Australia. I don't know for certain, but I *do* know that there was a letter from Australia for the Dean lately," said Mrs. Appleby, nodding her head, "and I don't think they have connections there. I shall know more soon. But I *think* I am right. I mentioned to-day having heard from Australia myself lately, and Mrs. Eustace decidedly changed colour."

"I should like to know, for I may be able to help the lad if he is there. Mr. Sartorius—he is the Governor's secretary, you know—he's a cousin

of mine. Janet, did you see Mary Fairford walking in the garden to-day with Clarence?"

"I did; but they did not stay out long."

"No," said Lady Le Mesurier, with a slight smile, "but I wish to know if he visits there. Do not forget this, Janet, if you please."

"I don't think it is of any consequence," remarked Mrs. Appleby, carelessly; "and it would be a great match for little Mary?" she added, inquiringly.

"I have other views for Clarence. I regard him as my special charge. His wife must have more in her than Mary Fairford has; she must be of good birth, too. In fact, I have an idea for Clarence."

"I don't doubt it," said Mrs. Appleby, dryly; "you generally have an idea for every one,"—then, seeing that Lady Le Mesurier looked displeased, she added, "ideas worth having too, and you usually carry them out to the great comfort of all concerned. My Laura and Matilda often say how much they owe to you."

"Laura's was a very easy affair," said Lady Le Mesurier, appeased; "but really Matilda's business made quite an old woman of me. I actually thought I was going to fail," she added, impressively.

"Catch you failing!" said the other lady, sharply.

"I never had a moment's uneasiness, though Matty certainly is very plain; and a plain girl without a penny does not often find such a *parti* as Mr. Barlow! But what is your idea for Sir Clarence?"

"Thereby hangs a tale," replied Lady Le Mesurier, "and there is the dressing-bell," she added, as a bell clanged out. "Stay with me, Janet, and I will send you home in the evening. I have a good deal to say, if I am to tell you my plans for Clarence."

"I have no cap," said Mrs. Appleby, doubtfully; but the doubt was only skirt-deep.

"Hortense can supply you, I am sure," replied Lady Le Mesurier, rising. "Come with me." And she led the way to her dressing-room, where Hortense, well used to the occurrence, made Mrs. Appleby fit to be seen; or, at least, more so than if she had been left to her own resources. During dinner the conversation was of course general, but when the two ladies were again alone—this time in a tiny gem of a room, into which only very special friends ever penetrated—Lady Le Mesurier's own private sitting-room,—they returned to the subject of her "idea for Clarence."

"I think I have mentioned these children before, Janet,—my niece Emily Fane, and my cousin Leofric's daughter, Gweneverc."

"No, you certainly never have," promptly replied Mrs. Appleby.

"I think you must be mistaken; but never mind, my dear Janet, if you have heard it you deserve to hear it all over again for pretending to forget. To begin at the beginning: my younger sister, Ethel, married a certain Captain Fane—a man of good family, but very far from being a good match. Ethel was always romantic. She did not live long enough, poor child, for the proverbial repentance to ensue. She left a little girl. Captain Fane was killed in action not long afterwards, in India, and the child was sent home. Its grandfather, Mr. Fane, promised to provide for it. That is sixteen years ago, or nearly. The girl must be nineteen now."

"Two things amaze me," said Mrs. Appleby. "First, that you never had this idea for Miss Fane before; secondly, why you think of her for Sir Clarence now."

"You shall soon understand both points. Old Mr. Fane died long ago, leaving this child a hundred and fifty pounds a year, which was what he had always allowed her. But I must tell my story more systematically. Just at the time that poor Ethel's little girl was sent home, my cousin Leofric Atheling died, and his wife died a few days afterwards. It was some fearful malignant fever, and

the whole family was swept off except one little girl. Leofric was a younger son and had made a very silly marriage: there was but little left for the child. So it happened that my family had a child to dispose of, just at the time that Mr. Fane wrote to ask our advice about the little creature from India. Captain Fane had named me her guardian, in his will, but of course her grandfather had the first claim to her. Our governess—not mine indeed, for I had left the school-room, but Ethel's and Githa's—had just married the inevitable clergyman,—I never knew a governess yet who had not a curate waiting to marry her when he got preferment,—and I was glad to be of use to her, as we all liked her. So the two children were made over to her, and she has brought them up. *Her* curate has a perpetual curacy in Derbyshire, and the arrangement has done very well; but I hope sincerely that Miss Francis has not grown too goody—or at least that she has failed to make Emily and Gwenevere follow suit."

"It don't much matter. With girls of that age it is merely a question of the people about them. Don't notice any little follies, and they will die out naturally. But go on with your story; you have not accounted for my two amazements yet."

"Well, the reason for my having failed to see after these girls earlier is very simple. The girls

were perfectly happy with Mrs. Darnell, and their income was sufficient for them, living so quietly. Had they been remarkable for beauty, or anything of that kind, I should have had them here when they grew up ; but I made Mrs. Darnell send me their photographs, and found that they are very common-looking girls—no air, and really plain, you know. Quite suited to the lives they had chosen. For I will confide to you, Janet,—but this you must never breathe to any one, nor even let the girls perceive that you know it,—my young ladies are both engaged.”

“Eh ! this complicates matters. You knew it, I suppose, before now ?”

“Oh yes, and approved. One, but I forget which, is engaged to a young clergyman, and the other to an officer, a subaltern in the Line. The matches appeared suitable at the time, so I put the two girls off my mind. But things are very different now : Emily Fane’s uncle, a younger brother of poor Captain Fane, who turned out oddly and disappeared centuries ago, died somewhere—in Canada, I think—quite lately, and left everything he had to his brother Albert’s children. So of course it all comes to Emily, and the child is quite an heiress : she will have between two and three thousand a year. Then as to Gwenevere, that whole branch of our family has died out, and this girl

inherits whatever there is. She is even better off than Emily, and there is landed property in her case. Oddly enough, I am guardian to both girls. Captain Fane's will named me—he had corresponded with me after poor Ethel's death,—and Emily cannot marry without my consent until she is twenty three. And the last of Gwenevere's uncles, my cousin Alfred, who died early this year, made me her guardian, and she must have my consent to her marriage until she is twenty-five—that is generally the rule in our family."

"And are you the only guardian?"

"In Emily's case, yes. My eldest brother is Gwenevere's second guardian, but I do not suppose he will take any trouble about her; but he is very anxious that she should marry his only son, who is just come home from India. Her small property ought never to have been separated from Saxelby, and may as well be joined to it again now."

"But they are both engaged!"

"Oh, we know nothing of engagements now."

"Why, you told me you had known of them all along."

"Yes; in fact, Emily asked my consent, and I gave it; but I have written to say that, under the present very altered circumstances, I think the girls ought to see more of the world and be in a position to know their own minds better before we seriously

consider these youthful affairs. I mean to ignore them, if possible ;—and not a hint, Janet, of my plans for them.”

“Plans which you will fail to carry out, I greatly fear. Sir Clarence, at least, will never marry a plain, awkward girl.”

“Yes ; but to my amazement, Mrs. Darnell (in reply to some question of mine) says, in her last letter, that they ~~are~~ both much improved, *even* since the photographs were taken. So I begin to hope the said photographs may not have done them justice. By the way, I had a letter from one of them ; it came while all those people were here, and I quite forgot it. Where *have* I put it ? I must have left it in my dressing-room.”

“In the drawing-room, you mean,” briskly replied Mrs. Appleby. “You had no letter in your hand when we went to dress.”

The bell was rung, and the letter found. It was written in a pretty, ladylike, but not very legible hand. Lady Le Mesurier opened it, and remarked—

“Judging by the writing, there is a want of decision here.”

“I don’t believe in that,” cried Mrs. Appleby, “in characters being discovered by the handwriting, I mean. It’s all nonsense. You might just as well promise to tell me what I like for

dinner by my writing, as to say whether I am decided or undecided."

Lady Le Mesurier never argued with her contradictory friend. She simply raised her handsome eyebrows a little, and read the letter aloud.

"Silverton Parsonage.

"MY DEAR LADY LE MESURIER,

"Mrs. Darnell tells me that you are quite right in saying that Emily and I ought to see the world before we are married. But I think you cannot know how unhappy you are making us all. I do not know how I can live away from all my dear friends and my happy home, and above all, from my darling Hugh. And poor Hugh, who says I make all the brightness of his life—a life in some ways so sad,—how can I leave him? Even if you think I ought not to be married just yet, please do let me remain here, where I can see Hugh every day. I am so miserable and so is he, and if you would, but say you have changed your mind we should be so happy again. If you cannot let us both—I mean Emily and me—remain here, let me stay. Hugh would miss me so dreadfully, and you know Claud Beresford has a curacy in London now, so that it matters less about Emily. And surely you would *never* have the heart to separate me from Hugh for four

whole years, and as soon as I am twenty-five I would surely marry him. You do not know how I love him. I am writing this unknown to any one except Emily, and she advised me not; but I do really think my heart will break if I am torn away from my darling Hugh. Why did this wretched fortune come to me? we were happier without it.

“Your affectionate Cousin,”

• “GWENEVERE ATHELING.”

Lady Le Mesurier laughed gently as she dropped the poor letter into the fire.

“‘Torn away from my darling Hugh!’” said she; “very sentimental. I *ought* to feel that I am a beast.”

“Well, she is right enough in one particular. You cannot keep her here for four years, if she proves obstinate; and that’s as obstinate a handwriting as ever I saw.”

Lady Le Mesurier laughed again at this consistent remark, and answered—

“Oh no—a few months will decide the question, and then she may go back to ‘darling Hugh.’ By the way, one doubt is solved by this letter—it is Emily Fane who is engaged to the clergyman. Beresford—what Beresfords does he belong to, I wonder? It would complicate matters unpleasantly if he turns out to be Lady Charlotte Beresford’s son.”

"You will answer the letter, I suppose?"

"Oh yes, certainly. What is it, Carbury,—the carriage ready? I did not think it was so late. Good-night, Janet; I shall see you to-morrow, I dare say."

I do not think I need occupy much space in describing the character of Gundreda, Lady Le Mesurier: in which a passion for managing everybody's affairs formed a very predominant portion. But a sketch of her history will make my story casier to understand. Sprung from an ancient, though untitled family, which boasted (probably untruly) of being of pure Saxon descent, she had been a beauty, and a proud, ambitious girl. I do not know how it was that she remained so long unmarried, but she was no longer young when she married Dean Le Mesurier, a widower with six daughters. All these daughters she had married, quite to her satisfaction and to theirs. Three pretty nieces had been her next charge, and had also been happily disposed of. Mrs. Appleby's daughters had been provided for (matrimonially) by her kind care. She was really kind-hearted, and wished that people should be happy—only it must be in her way, "in a rational way," as she herself put it. She was always planning for someone's good, and would take trouble to ensure it, but it was for love of power and success, and not for

love of the persons to be benefited. These she regarded very much as a chess-player regards his pieces. Very late in life (he was much her senior), the Dean became the head of his family, and a baronet; he only lived a year or so after this event, and was succeeded by a young nephew of whom he had been very fond: the Sir Clarence of whom we have heard.

Lady Le Mesurier answered Gwenevere's letter that night before she went to bed, and we may as well follow the reply to that pathetic appeal to Silverton Parsonage.





CHAPTER II. •

AT SILVERTON.



SILVERTON Parsonage was a very pretty spot. The curacy was worth a hundred a year, but the house was as good as if it had been a large living. The Church—one of the oldest in England, I should think, for the date 1120 is carved over the door—is very small, and when Mr. Darnell was appointed to the curacy, it was all but tumbling down. But by making the state of the case known to the nobleman to whom that part of Derbyshire may be said to belong, he had procured funds to put it into decent repair, and now had a good congregation, whereas in his predecessor's time three old women and the clerk had formed the attendance, and a red brick bandbox with green doors and staring windows had been the resort of such of the remaining parishioners as resorted to any other

place than the public-house on Sundays and holidays. Once, long ago, Silverton had been an enormous parish, and Silverton Parsonage the residence of the Rector; but now the parish was divided, and the Parsonage was rather out of proportion to the Cure. However, it was a good thing for the Darnells, as it enabled them to add to their income by taking the two orphans, Emily Fane and Gwenevere Atheling, into their family; and an orphan nephew of Mr. Darnell, Claud Beresford, had also been brought up at Silverton, having no relations in the world except his uncle and aunt there. The Darnells had no children of their own, and the two girls had never known their parents, so that it is not wonderful that all concerned had almost forgotten that the arrangement was liable to be interfered with. When Emily engaged herself to Claud Beresford, Lady Le Mesurier's consent had been asked as a matter of form, and in the same way she was written to about Gwenevere's engagement; but nothing would have surprised the Silverton party more than her interference, if she had done more than signify her consent. But Claud Beresford, who had about fifty pounds a year independent of his profession, could not marry until he had a better income; and Hugh Vincent, Gwenevere's lover, had been severely wounded in one of our Indian battles, and was on half pay,

having, however, the promise of those in authority that he should go back to his regiment as soon as his health would allow him to return to his duties. Of this there was a good hope, as his recovery was said to require only time and patience to complete it ; but, until he could return to his profession and go to India, he too thought it prudent to defer his marriage. He was the son of the only rich parishioner of Silverton, Mr. Vincent, of Meadowlands, whose forefathers had been farmers, and who was a farmer himself, though an educated man. Hugh was the second son.

When Emily first, and soon afterwards Gwenevere, were informed of their increase of fortune, the first thought of these unsophisticated young ladies was, that *now* they could be married at once: but much to their surprise, neither the Darnells nor the young gentlemen immediately concerned agreed with them.

"It would not do at all, my dear," said Mrs. Darnell. "Lady Le Mesurier would never allow it."

"But why not?" asked Emily. "She has given her consent, why should she interfere now?"

"Because you are heiresses now, in a small way, and you will find that Miss Atheling—Lady Le Mesurier, I mean,—will think that you ought to see something of society before you make what she will *now* call bad matches. Indeed, I never could under-

stand, to be frank with you, why she did not insist upon your both paying her a visit two years ago, when she wrote for your photographs; I felt so sure she would."

"So sure, Mammie, that you got us both a blue silk dress and a white muslin apiece! Yes, and that blue silk finished up Claud, I know, so it was of some use," answered Emily. Then she laughed—such a merry musical thrill of laughter—looked at Gwenevere, and nodded.

Gwenevere smiled and shook her head.

"What are you laughing at?" demanded Mrs. Darnell.

"I am not going to tell you just yet, Mammie. Come, Gwen, let us go and eat up those plums on the south wall; Hugh will be here presently, and then you will do nothing but look at each other, and I want my plums."

The two girls passed out through the window, which opened like a door. Mrs. Darnell looked after them, and sighed.

"My dear dear children," she said, "I almost wish these fortunes had never come to them. They were so happy. And if I know Gundreda Atheling, she will take them from us. Poor Claud, what will he do if he loses Emily?"

"But why should he lose her, Anne?" said her husband, looking up from his book.

"She's such a gay little creature! If she once gets a taste for a free, careless life, such as her aunt will introduce her to now, do you think she will ever settle down to be a hard-working clergyman's wife?"

"They would be very comfortably off," said Mr. Darnell.

"Yes; but my dear Paul, you don't know what a charm there is in that kind of life. I only saw it as it were from my corner: but these girls, pretty, pleasant, and rich,—it will be so new and so delightful; and unless they marry into their own rank they must give all that up. For Gwennie I have no fear—she is so quiet and loving, so religious too; but my gay little Emily! it is a terrible risk for Claud."

"Poor Claud, it would be a bitter blow for him!" said Paul Darnell. "But I don't despair, I hope all will be well. Emily is the most truthful creature I ever knew; whatever she may do, she will never deceive him. And a man can bear a good deal as long as he can keep his faith in the truth of woman; and, after all, Lady Le Mesurier may not interfere."

But the very next day, a letter from Lady Le Mesurier made it plain that she would interfere. Emily said that she was very sorry, but that it could only be for a time, and if she *must* go, she meant to

enjoy herself. But Claud's letter in answer to hers containing the news made her cry, though not given to weeping, and made her a little angry too. She wrote a long reply, and sent with it a small parcel, about the contents of which she was mysterious, not telling even Gwenevere what they were. Poor Gwennie cried till her eyes were sore, and then took courage to write to this dreadful guardian ; and it is time that the answer to her letter should be delivered.

Between the porch and the gate of Silverton Parsonage, lay a broad straight gravelled path, bordered by flower-beds ; up and down this walk, on a brisk October morning, paced Emily Fanc. When she reached the gate she looked over it, nearly breaking her neck in the endeavour to look down the road, which ran at right angles with it ; when she reached the house she peeped in at the window of the drawing-room, and called out in her sweet cheery voice, " Not yet, Gwen." In the drawing-room sat Gwenevere, waiting with her heart in her eyes for the letter which might come, which *must* come to-day. It is a good opportunity, while they watch for their letter, to tell you what these two girls were like. To begin with Gwenevere, who was the elder and by far the more striking looking. She was tall and slight, graceful and dignified in her slow gentle movements. She had the most exquisite com-

plexion, regular features, eyes like forget-me-nots for pure blueness, a wild-rose bloom, and hair of every shade from pale yellow to deep brown, including a decidedly red tinge. You will perceive that she was a very beautiful girl, and if her lovely face was not very much given to change of expression, it always looked good, pure, and gentle. Emily Fane was not to be compared to her for beauty; but she had flashes of beauty, and during those flashes was more beautiful than Gwenevere. Emily had no colour—her skin was of an even, creamy tint,—her hair was very dark and abundant, her eyes of a blue grey with remarkably fine dark lashes, curved like hyacinth bells. A pretty little mouth, a pert little nose, a very small head and face, and the most graceful, rounded, pliant, little figure; her quick movements full of grace, her short-sighted eyes full of mischief. This was Emily Fane, whose lover once said of himself that he was the best-teased curate in the kingdom. Yet, in spite of all the mirth and mischief of the little face, there was something in it of an appealing look; her eyes seemed to say, "Don't be unkind to me, for I could be very miserable." Ah, Emily, bright little Emily! I hope that life will be kind to you; for the saddest sight I ever saw was a face like yours, with all the mirth and mischief washed out by tears, and the appeal in the sweet eyes changed to "Let me be at peace, I ask no more."

Another turn : this time she descried a speck in the distance, and her double eye-glass soon turned the speck into the postman on his pony, so she waited for him at the gate. Yes, the expected letter had come ; this was undoubtedly Lady Le Mesurier's long-tailed writing, and this her very unmake-outable monogram—a device calculated to make the beholder profoundly miserable unless he knew beforehand that the letters were “G. A. Le M.”

Emily flew to the house with her prize.

“Gwen ! Gwen ! your letter has come ! None for me. I hope Claud hasn't jumped over Westminster Bridge in despair, after reading my scolding.”

“O give me the letter, Emily,” cried Gwenevere, “and come in—let us see what our fate is.”

Emily sat down on the sofa beside her cousin, and kissed her.

“Come, Gwennie ! it is not worth all this fear and trembling. It is only a delay, Gwennie dear, and we're all young enough, to wait. Come, read it to me.”

“Open it and read it to me ; I cannot see.”

Emily opened the missive and read aloud.

“Moorside House, Fairminster.

“MY DEAR GWENEVERE,

“I am so sorry that you regard your visit to me in the light of an affliction, but I shall try to

make it as pleasant to you as I can. Still, my dear girl, you must make up your mind to come to me for a time. You are now (I am writing this to Emily as well as to you) what I may almost call heiresses, and the engagements which were very suitable when you were penniless, are certainly unsuitable now. I am your guardian, and I should be failing signally in my duty to you if I did not make you understand what you are resigning, and put you in a position to judge for yourselves, whether you will resign it or not. This is all I wish to do ; and all I ask of you is to come to me free, and to remain with me until I am satisfied that you are qualified to decide your fate for yourselves. Perhaps a very short time may suffice to prove to me, that you are only suited to the lot you had chosen when it seemed certain that nothing better was open to you. If so, I promise to tell you so candidly ; but I confess that I shall greatly blame Mrs. Darnell, because I know that she is capable of giving you every advantage. Beauty, of course, she could not give you, but I shall hope to find you in all other respects such as girls bearing the names of Fane and Atheling ought to be. Read this letter to Emily, and think well of what I say. I do not ask very much, and I trust that you will see that it is your duty to yield to my wishes in this matter—by which I mean that you yield

cheerfully, for as to the visit I give you no choice. On that, it is *my* duty to insist. Come to me, then, free for the time from any formal engagement, and I will make the time pass pleasantly to you. Then, if you deliberately choose comparative poverty and complete obscurity, you will at least be in no danger of repenting when it is too late, for you will know what you are resigning.

“Your affectionate Guardian and Cousin,
“GUNDREDA A. LE MESURIER.”

When Emily came to the signature, she laid down the letter and laughed. Gwenevere, on the contrary, began to cry.

“Emily,” said she, “you have no heart!”

“Are you sure of that?” replied Emily. “How about the circulation, my dear? Seriously though, Gwen, mind what I am going to say to you. My dear Aunt is a clever woman, and she throws out a hint here which is half a threat, and which we must remember. If we don’t behave with sense and make the best of ourselves, the blame will be laid upon our darling Mammie, and we shall not be allowed to carry out my nice little plan for her.”

“Mammie is too sorry to part with us to care about money,” cried Gwenevere, indignantly.

“Indeed she is! but that is no reason why we should not care for her. She has been really a

mother to us both—we've been as happy as she could make us, and she has been happy because we were like her own to her. But you know that their income is so small that they could not live upon it, and if we do nothing, Mammie and Mr. Darnell will have to take pupils, and Mammie is not fit to be bothered with half a dozen horrid children. Besides, for all I know, Lady Le Mesurier might prevent her getting any pupils, if she fancied that we had not been well brought up. So really, Gwen, we must be careful."

"She will never allow us to carry out your plan," said Gwenevere, dolefully.

"If we are very wise and wary we may succeed. We must not rush at her about it, but watch for a good opening. But oh, Gwen dear, when I look at you, and think of that delicious remark about beauty not being givable! I am ready to laugh again, even at the risk of another snub from you."

"Oh, my poor Hugh, how he will miss me!"

"Indeed he will; but he is much stronger than he was. It is so well that this did not happen when he was so weak and ill. I dare say a year will see us free from Lady Le Mesurier; you'll be one and twenty very soon now. Come, Gwennie dear, do try to be less miserable. You know, better than I do, that this is no accident. It is

part of our education—a new school we are being sent to.”

“Of course we ought to be resigned,” faltered Gwenevere.

“Resigned!” laughed Emily. “My dear, I may try to be that when Claud marries his Rector’s fascinating daughter, and Mammie and Mr. Darnell write us word that they’ve been swallowed up in an earthquake. Just now, I think, to be frank with you, that a little common sense will serve my turn; and I always thought until now that you had more sense than I have.—Why, here comes Hugh. Now I’ll leave you to talk it over with him. I want to take another turn or so before luncheon.”

She opened the window and passed out, whispering to Hugh Vincent, as she shook hands with him, “Do try to be cheerful, Hugh, or poor Gwen will fret herself ill.”

Hugh smiled, but not very cheerfully. He was a tall, good-looking young man, but just now he was sallow and hollow-eyed, and his lips were set as if pain was familiar to him. He had the unmistakable look of habitual suffering, and it was no wonder that he was sad now, for Gwenevere was the one joy of his life. But he was a high-minded, honourable man, and had declared from the first that Lady Le Mesurier was right in insisting on delay: nay, although to give up the

engagement even for a time was very grievous to him, he had from the first said that unless Gwen-evere went to Fairminster free, she might as well not go at all.

Emily walked down to the gate, and looked out once more.

"I dare say he did come," she murmured; "he'd have written, if not. Of course he would have to walk, as no one is expecting him. I'm not expecting him, you know."

She laughed, and beginning to pace up and down the walk, she began to sing in a low murmur the old ballad, "When wild war's distant blast was blown." It is a long ditty, and she went on with it, thinking of other things, until she came to the words—

"A leal light heart, was in my breast."

These words she suddenly sang at the full pitch of her clear voice—then stopped, leaned against the gate, and laughed.

"Just what poor Gwen can't believe in, and even my dear Mammie is the same: 'A leal light heart.' I hope I'm leal; but I really don't see any cause for such lamentation!"

Setting her back against the gate, she took up her song again, singing it with great spirit and pathos, until she came to the words, "Art thou my

ain dear Willie?" when a man's voice behind her made unexpected reply—

"Your own dear Claud, you mean, I suppose. Here I am, Emily."

Emily started, and a look of bright recognition and joy flashed over her face, but she banished it instantly, and turned round with an air of cool surprise and moderate welcome that was astonishing to behold.

"You here, Mr. Beresford!" she said. "Mrs. Darnell did not tell me that she expected you; but she will be glad to see you. Come in. How do you do?"—holding out her hand.

Claud Beresford betrayed no sign of surprise—perhaps no saucy mood *could* surprise him now,—but gravely took the small hand in his, and said—

"Won't you finish your song, Miss Fane?"

"Well, I should rather like to do so. You know your way. You'll find your Aunt in the study, and I shall come in when I hear the bell."

"Emily, don't waste my precious time. I have but one day to stay."

Emily raised her eyebrows, and replied, coolly—

"You actually came from London to see your Uncle and Aunt for one day! what a very dutiful nephew! Don't make *any* delay, please. I can shut the gate, of course."

Thus reminded of the gate, Claud shut it, and said—

"Come with me, Emily. Let us walk about and have our quarrel out."

Emily walked along beside him. They were a queer contrast, as far as looks went, for Claud was very tall, very dark, and very plain. Fine white teeth, a most pleasant smile, and good dark eyes, were all the claims he possessed to good looks, but he looked clever—both in the English and the Irish sense of the word.

"Why did you write me such a wrathful letter, Emily?" said he, leading the way into the garden. "And to send me back my poor little ring, and——"

"And *all* your presents, Mr. Beresford,—of course. Believe me, I searched everywhere for the poor remains of the hoop you once brought me from Buxton, but I fear Polly has burned it. Except the hoop, I returned you everything. I hope they may be useful to you in the future."

"When?" asked Claud, drawing from his pocket a small box, which, on being opened, displayed a tiny turquoise ring, a silver locket, and a minute thimble.

"I *hope* she'll have small hands," remarked Emily, regarding these objects with grave anxiety. Claud burst into what she called his "big bow-

wow" laugh, and only laughed the more when she surveyed him with severe amazement.

"Here, you sprite," said he, "take them back," and he poked the box into the pocket of her jacket. "Keep them, Emily: and when you send me that wee little ring again, I shall know that you are changed. And that won't happen, Emily. I didn't express it well in writing, I suppose, but what I meant is this, my dear: I have known you all your life, and loved you as long as I've known you: and I trust in your love for me as I trust in mine for you. No engagement could make me more certain of it. Free, your Aunt wishes you to be: and free you are,—free to enjoy your visit, free to make new friends, free to be as happy as a queen, and free to say to me when the time comes, 'Here I am, Claud, ready to be your tyrant and torment all your life long.' I don't care to have you tied hand and foot by a formal engagement, Emily; nay, I verily believe that if in time to come you were to tell me honestly that you had met with some one so much better than I am that you preferred him to me, I could almost comfort myself in my loneliness by the thought of your happiness."

"And should you think just as well of me, as if I remained faithful?" asked the girl, turning upon him suddenly. Claud considered the question.

"I don't know that," he said ; "I think I should be surprised."

"There then," said Emily ; "shake hands, I forgive you. If you had said Yes, I don't know what I might not have been capable of. You are quite right, Claud. All we want is a little patience, and to trust one another. I was not really so very angry, but I thought you might come home if you thought I was, and I *did* want to see you again before I go away. I will keep my ring ; I'll wear it to the chain I have my father's locket on : I won't put it on my finger, because I don't think we ought to defy Lady Le Mesurier, but to please her as much as we can."

"But about writing, Emily ? I don't know how to get on without your letters."

"I shall write openly to you, and do you write to me. It is not as if I were a child, you know. Come to luncheon now, for you must be starving. I wonder is Gwenevere melted yet. Poor Gwen ! she can't make up her mind to it at all."

Then they turned towards the house, and joined the rest of the party at the lunch-table.





CHAPTER III.

GOOD-BYE.

WHEN the lamp was lighted that evening in the drawing-room at Silverton, the whole party gathered round the fire. Mrs. Darnell looked up from her knitting, and said—

“You did not show me Lady Le Mesurier’s letter, Gwenevere.”

“Hugh, you have it,” said Gwenevere, and Hugh produced it; but Emily sprang up and seized it as he was holding it out.

“Just wait one moment,” said she. “I thought you had read it, Mammie?”

“Gwenevere read me part of it, but I want to hear it all, and I want Paul to hear it too.”

“Did she say nothing, Gwen?” whispered Emily, bending down to her Cousin’s ear.

“She said, ‘How she can make that remark after seeing your photographs, I don’t know.’”

"And you told her?"

"No!" said Gwenevere, looking surprised; "do you wish her to know?"

"Do you think I could leave home without confessing my sins?" said Emily, laughing, and speaking aloud. "I might have preferred a less public occasion—but it is only doing penance. Mammie dear, I'm going to read the letter aloud; I'm so certain that no one can do it justice but myself. What kind of voice has my Aunt when she means to be minded, Mammie?"

"Her voice is always sweet and low, and I think, when annoyed, she used to speak slowly and evenly—without much emphasis."

"*That*," said Emily, "will be a difficult style to me, for I am emphatically disposed. However, we can but try."

And the letter was read through in a solemn monotone.

"Well done," said Claud; "it's a pity you cannot be a curate—your intoning would be splendid."

"But, for pity's sake,"^f exclaimed Mr. Darnell, "will any one tell me why the good lady has taken it for granted that the children are frights?"

"Not frights, not frights—only no beauties," said Emily hastily, and getting very pink.

"Emily," said Claud, in a reproving voice, "I begin to suspect——"

"Hold your tongue, Sir; no one wants to hear your suspicions. I'm going to confess, good people. Do you remember, two years ago, Lady Le Mesurier sent for our photographs, and we all went to Buxton to have them taken?"

"Certainly, I remember: and beautiful photographs they were."

"I'm glad you like them, Mammie, for perhaps we may give them to you."

"Why, only one of each was done, dear."

"It was all your fault, Ma'am," went on Emily. "You looked pensively at those photographs and said, 'I shall not keep you long, children, when your Aunt secs*these.' And indeed Gwen's *was* lovely, and mine not so bad. That night we had a long talk, Gwen and I. We were so happy—we didn't wish to be sent for by Lady Le Mesurier at all. Next day I did it. I packed up two photographs, done by the same people, and I—it *was* a shame, Mammie!—I sent them to my Aunt and kept ours: and behold, we heard no more of Lady Le Mesurier until this unlucky money reminded her of our existence."

"Emily, you little monkey," said Mrs. Darnell, "how could you play such a trick! Oh, how angry your Aunt will be!"

"She'll send me to bed without any dinner, remarked Emily, speculatively; "that is, if she remembers the affair: perhaps she won't."

"Whose photographs did you send?" inquired Mr. Darnell, trying to look grave. Emily made a most expressive little grimace at him; but Gwen-evere, less alive to the inference, answered—

"She sent Maria and Bertha's—don't you remember we had them all done the same day?"

"Yes," said Emily, interrupting her, "and I had a better device still. She asked, you know, for a bit of our hair, and Gwen had given me a lovely bit, but I carefully picked out all the gold and all the dark threads, and left only unmitigated carrots."

But Hugh and Claud looked at each other, and pictured to themselves the feelings of the fine lady when the counterfeit presentments of honest, sandy haired, freckled Maria, and little pug-nosed Bertha, Hugh's two sisters, were palmed off upon her as the likenesses of her young relatives; and I regret to say that these two graceless young men shouted with laughter until their eyes were full of tears.

"Oh, Gwen!" whispered Emily, "why did you tell?"

Gwenevere looked puzzled—then grew crimson, and cried—

"I never thought of that!"

"Never mind, Gwenevere," said Hugh, "I won't betray the fate of the photographs to Maria or Bertha. There is no harm done. Never mind

Emily, I have more reason than any one else to thank you for these two happy years."

"And you forgive me, Mammie?"

"You are a very naughty child, Emily; and I'm afraid Lady Le Mesurier will be vexed."

"But I am not *her* child, so I don't care. It was all your fault, for saying she would take us away."

Next day, Claud was obliged to return to London, and Hugh, having offered to drive him into Buxton to catch the train, the two young men set out together. All the party, except Emily, was gathered at the door to see them off.

"Claud, Emily is in the study," whispered Gwenevere: and Claud promptly disappeared.

"I wanted to say good-bye to you alone, Claud," said the small lady, putting her two hands into his. "See, here is the photograph I *didn't* send to my Aunt. I give it to you in the character of my old playfellow, comrade and friend. And good-bye, Claud. Have patience, and all will be well with us."

"Good-bye, my little treasure. God bless you, Emily. I hope you'll be happy at Fairminster, dear. I should like to know that you were enjoying yourself. I know you won't put enjoyment first. Don't let them make a fine lady of you—remember you are a clergywoman elect, and so don't forget the use of your dear little hands! My little Emily—my plague and darling—good-bye."

Then he was gone, and Emily flew up to her room and had a comfortable cry. There was no trace of it upon her sunny face, however, when she came down.

Meantime Claud and Hugh drove along the well-known lanes, exchanging not one word until they reached the high road. Then Claud looked at his friend, and said—

"Well, old fellow?"

"I don't wonder you are sad," answered Hugh. "She is a dear little girl—and it's a great risk."

"Risk of what?"

"Of her learning to love gaiety and grandeur and pleasant society. I think, old fellow, that you ought to be prepared. Emily is very young."

"Not so much younger than Gwenevere, if you come to that. As to preparation, no amount thereof will make a man like the notion of being hanged. I don't mean to prepare for anything. Emily is truth itself."

"But such a gay, careless little creature," Hugh answered. Claud thought of the little face as he had seen it last, pale and quivering, and the eyes dimmed by unshed tears.

"Careless! No, she isn't," he said bluntly. "I trust my happiness to her keeping, Hugh, without a fear."

"Well—I hope you are right," said Hugh.

"That was capital about the photographs, wasn't it? How poor Gwennie blushed when she betrayed the secret: my poor Gwenevere, she is so transparent!"

Claud did not speak: but like a certain parrot, he thought the more. He thought that it was Emily, not Gwenevere, who had confessed about the photographs, keeping back only what might have vexed Hugh: which Gwenevere had blundered out, for want of thought. But there was no use in convincing Hugh of Emily's superiority, because Emily belonged to him, Claud Beresford—and he had no intention of giving her up to any one, in spite of Lady Le Mesurier. Hugh, on his part, had no doubts of Gwenevere. For more than a year she had been his very own—they had shared every thought, every feeling. Hugh was a deeply religious man, and Gwenevere had followed his lead in this, as in all else. It would have seemed to him little short of sacrilege to doubt her, or to fear that she might come to like the gay world to which she was going too well for her happiness as his wife. His only grief was the loss of her sweet companionship, on which he had come to depend more than he would have done, had his own home been more congenial. But though there was no lack of affection between him and his own people, he felt far more at home at Silverton Parsonage, with Gwenevere by his side.

Next day a letter from Lady Le Mesurier announced that her maid, Hortense Blanc, would meet the two girls in Chester, if Mr. Darnell would kindly bring them so far on their southward journey: and she enclosed a sum of money "to cover *all* expenses," as she was careful to state.

"Do not delay to get new dresses," she went on, "for you can get them here better than in Buxton or Derby. Shall you bring your maids, or shall I engage them for you? Please let me know in time."

"Our maids!" said Emily. "Here's promotion, Gwen. Oh, Mammie, *may* I take poor Patty Dent? She will never have health for a dressmaker, and she will never be able to keep her resolution about that nasty tipsy fellow if she stays here; and the climate would do her good, I know. I must run this moment and ask her. How much may I give her—eight pounds a year?"

Mrs. Darnell laughed.

"That is what I pay Polly," said she, "but it would hardly be enough for a lady's-maid. You had better say thirty, and even that is probably not enough. It will be a grand thing for poor Patty—the constant needlework gives her so much time to fret about Roger Triscott. It is a kind thought, Emily."

Gwenevere looked up from her book, and said—

"Patty can attend to both until we see how we can manage. If I *must* have a maid, I should like to have one who can dress my hair properly, I am so stupid about it."

"Do you really think we can get along with only one maid, Gwen? I feel *so* helpless!" said Emily, laughing. "I'm off to see Patty."

Patty Dent jumped at the offer, poor girl, and was sent off to Buxton to fit herself out. And in a few days more, Mr. Darnell being ready to leave home, good-bye had to be said to Silverton Parsonage—to dear Mammie, all the school children, all the old women, all the choir, all the neighbours—and last, but worst of all to Gwenevere, to Hugh Vincent. Mrs. Darnell went with them to Buxton, where they took the train for Manchester. Hugh was there too. It was a terrible business; Gwenevere was actually speechless, but Emily's tongue seemed brisk enough. The last the two left upon the platform saw of the travellers was when Emily put her head out of the carriage window and whispered—

"It will be a damp journey, Mammie. I only hope I may not be drowned. I wish I had brought some extra pocket-handkerchiefs, for Gwen has used up hers already. Good-bye, my own darling Mammie. Good-bye, Hugh,—don't be afraid for Gwen, for I will coax her to stop crying presently.

Don't look so wretched, dear Hugh ; it is only for a time. Good-bye."

Mr. Darnell returned next day, reporting that he had resigned his charge to so dignified and magnificent a lady that he had at first believed her to be Lady Le Mesurier herself ; and, in reply to Hugh's questions, he admitted that Gwenevere had cried all day in spite of Emily's coaxing.

"Emily did not seem to care much about going," said Hugh ; "poor Gwennie does all the fretting."

"Emily has great self-control," replied Mr. Darnell. "Here, Anne, she bought this book in Manchester,—insisted upon driving to a bookseller's, whereby we nearly lost our train."

It was a beautiful copy of Lord Lytton's "My Novel," of which they had seen a review, when Mrs. Darnell remembered saying she greatly wished to read it. Written on the first page, in pencilling, were the words, "Dear Mammie, read this, and don't fret—I shall write soon."

"It was a kind thought of our little firefly," said Mr. Darnell. "How we shall miss them both, Anne!"





CHAPTER IV.

FAIRMINSTER.

THE train ran into Fairminster station at about seven o'clock in the evening of the day after the parting I have described, bringing the two girls and their "suite," as they saw duly chronicled in the *Fairminster Intelligencer* next day, to their new home. A footman presented himself at the door of the carriage, and said—

"Miss Atheling and Miss Fane?—my lady desired me to say that she was afraid of the cold, Ma'am, but the carriage is here."

Gwenevere began to collect her belongings, but Emily perceiving Mademoiselle Hortense smile to herself, said—"We shan't want those, Gwenevere—come along."

She gave her cousin a gentle pull, and Gwenevere followed her in silence. They entered the carriage, which was at once driven off.

"But, Emily!" cried Gwenevere, "we have left Patty and Hortense behind—and all our luggage, too."

"My dear," said Emily, "we are now fairly launched in high life, and let us behave accordingly. I suppose people don't see after everything when they have servants to do it for them. I saw Hortense grinning. Now, Gwen, *do* keep your wits about you, and don't betray your rustic breeding more than you can help."

Gwenevere promised, but added piteously, "I do hate changes, and new things of every kind."

"And I delight in new things," Emily replied. "But don't cry, Gwennie; your eyes are red and your nice nose quite swelled already. Remember, in a few weeks all these things will leave off being new. How do I look, Gwen? Cold, I hope, and my nose pink—is it?"

"You look *blue*," said Gwenevere, "and your nose is swelled."

"I am so glad. The photograph fraud will not be detected at first sight. Fancy, if she refused to receive us, crying, 'These are impostors; where are my dear wards?' Here we are, I suppose. What a pretty house!"

The carriage drew up, the door of the house flew open, and light and warmth seemed to stream out into the cold damp air. In the hall stood Lady Le

Mesurier, waiting to welcome her guests. Tired out, both by the long journey and the strain on their spirits, the two girls by no means looked their best; Lady Le Mesurier never thought of the photographs.

"How cold you are, you poor children!" she said. "Is this Gwenevere? And you are Emily. Come with me to the drawing-room until your maid arrives, and then I will show you your rooms."

"Oh, but the fire looks pleasant!" exclaimed Emily. "It is bitterly cold to-night."

She knelt upon the rug, and pulled off her gloves to warm her frozen little hands. Gwenevere sank upon a chair. Lady Le Mesurier felt a little relieved. Their movements were graceful, natural, and quiet. She had coffee ready for them, and told them that dinner would be ready as soon as they were dressed.

"But I always think a cup of coffee revives one," she said, as she poured it out. Then she sat and watched them in silence—the girls drank coffee and warmed themselves while she made her observations. In a few minutes a servant came to say that the luggage had arrived.

"Then I will take you to your rooms," said Lady Le Mesurier. "Can you be ready in half an hour, do you think? Very well. Tell cook, Carberry, in half an hour we shall be ready."

She led the way through the lighted passages, and stopped at the door of a small room, very prettily furnished as a sitting-room.

"This room you will share," she said; "I thought you would like that. Your bed-rooms open off it. Ah, you are here, Hortense! Which is Miss Atheling's room?"

"Mrs. Dent has had all the boxes brought into this room, Madame, as the young ladies have put their things together. She can arrange them presently."

Poor Patty—much flurried by being called Mrs. Dent, when, as she said to herself, she "wasn't a married person," and also by having been expected by the Frenchwoman to unpack trunks, the keys of which were in Emily Fane's pocket—was waiting nervously in the room indicated, which was as warm and bright as fire and candlelight could make it.

"Why, your maid has not unpacked your dinner dresses! You will hardly be ready in half an hour," said Lady Le Mesurier, regarding Patty with disfavour.

"She had not the keys," said Emily. "I have them. But we shall be ready in half an hour, indeed,—I assure you we can."

"Shall I send Hortense to help you when I am dressed?" said Lady Le Mesurier.

"Oh no," said Emily, hastily. She saw plainly that both her companions in misery were on the point of tears, which made her extremely anxious to get her Aunt out of the room. Lady Le Mesurier glanced at Gwenevere, suppressed a smile, and departed. No sooner had the door shut than Gwenevere sank into a chair, and Patty flopped down upon another. Gwenevere wept in silence, Patty blubbered noisily.

"What's the matter, good people?" said Emily.

"Oh, Emily! such a cold, cold reception," murmured Gwenevere.

"Did you expect anything else? I like her ten times better than if she had gushed. She knows we come unwillingly—you wrote yourself and told her so,—she never saw us before, and what could she do more than receive us kindly, which she did? If she had appeared delighted, I should have hated her. She can't be delighted, any more than we are. And how could she talk when you never opened your lips? Patty, stop that noise; I really cannot bear it. What's the matter with *you*, pray?"

"Oh, Miss Fane, I shall go home to-morrow. I am not fit, miss, to be your maid. I'm nigh puzzled to death. And there's four men and a boy, Miss; and Mamselle Hor-tongs asking me why I didn't unpack your things, as if I'd go meddling. And——"

"Now, look here, both of you," cried Emily. "We had half an hour to dress; we've wasted ten minutes already. Gwen, stand up and take off your jacket. Patty, here are the keys. Open that trunk, and tumble everything out on the floor until you come to our white muslin dresses. You can tidy it all up presently. Even if you go home to-morrow, you must really help us now. Hurry, Gwen, hurry. That's right. Sit down here by the fire, dear, and I'll be your maid for once, and put your hair to rights. Give me that brush-bag, Patty,—the bag, not my cork-soled boots. Don't put your foot into my good hat, whatever you do. Patty, the four men and the boy won't eat you; and you shall have my keys next time we travel, and be ready to do your work. You see, I was like yourself; I knew no better. Now, Gwen, that looks very nice. Here is hot water, plenty of it. Wash your face, it will refresh you. Where's your sponge. Of all places, it is in the crown of my hat! That's the dress, Patty. Now, you put on Miss Atheling's while I get ready. Don't let me hear either of you speak until we are ready to go down."

"But I can't find your dress, Miss Emily."

"Why, you have both in your hands! Miss Atheling does not want two, does she? Oh, Gwen, how refreshing the hot water is! No; I won't allow you to sit down yet; you *must* dress first.

Where are your slippers? Oh, I have them. Did you see that my Aunt had on gloves? I suppose we ought to have white ones. Here's the glove box. How lucky Claud brought us some, isn't it, Gwen? I'm going to tie this black velvet round your neck, Gwen, with the cross Hugh gave you. Oh dear!" (for at the mention of Hugh, Gwenevere became tearfully inclined again, and Patty had never ceased to sob at intervals), "I declare you are a provoking pair! I have to drive you as if you were a couple of silly sheep."

"You're a dreadful little tyrant," said poor Gwennie, plaintively.

"It's well for you I am. I really thought you had more sense," answered Emily, hotly.

But she had her reward, for they were both ready when the bell rang. Emily looked at the heap of confusion on the floor, and laughed merrily.

"Now, Patty, I will give you good advice. As soon as we are gone, you lock both the doors of this room, put the keys in your pocket, and go to the kitchen—housekeeper's room, I suppose, though,—and get some tea, and eat a good meal. Warm yourself, and rest yourself, and then come back here alone, put all this confusion to rights, unpack the trunks and put everything away—my goods in one room and Miss Atheling's in the other. Then lie down in that big chair and go to sleep

until we come back. To-morrow we'll talk over what you said to-night—but not now. Come; Gwennie; we must go to the drawing-room, I suppose."

Everything went off very quietly after that. The girls were very sleepy, and Lady Le Mesurier mercifully sent them off to bed early. Patty was more cheerful; she had obeyed Emily's directions, and was, moreover, comforted to find that she was to sleep in a small room close to her mistress.

"Go to bed, Patty; you are dead tired, and I almost think we can undress without help this one night. Don't you think so, Gwen? Oh dear, but I am tired myself, and I know it's a year since we left home! Good-night, Patty; you'll be as bright as anything to-morrow. I meant to write to Mammie to-night, but I really can't."

Indeed, as she soon afterwards fell asleep in the act of reading her Bible, it was plain that writing was out of the question. They were soon in bed, and we may fairly hope they slept well.

Emily awoke very early in the morning, being an early riser. No one seemed astir in the house yet, but the sun was shining cheerfully through the heavy curtains. She got out of bed and pattered across the room with bare feet to peep into Gwennie's room. Gwennie was asleep; how pure and peaceful she looked! Then she raised the window

curtain and looked out. What she saw pleased her: though it was only a kitchen garden laid out in orderly squares, bordered with narrow flower-beds; a few late Gloire de Dejon roses, and scarlet geraniums in profusion, made a gay appearance. But it was cold, though bright, so, having wakened Patty, Emily gladly crept back into bed and had another comfortable doze, from which she was roused by Gwenevere, ready dressed, and very much amused to find her so fast asleep.

"Oh, Gwennie, Gwennie, you'll betray my sins this day!" cried Emily. "You look quite yourself again."

"Emily, I was wondering if my poor Hugh——"

"Gwen, dear, do listen to me for a moment. There you are, ready to cry again, and you will make yourself actually ill. Besides, it would provoke any one to have you always crying. Lady Le Mesurier means to be kind to us, and why should we make her uncomfortable by behaving as if we were in prison and she our jailer? And we have no right to rebel—now have we, Gwennie? It can't be right, I am sure. Sit down there by the fire, and talk to me till I am dressed, and then we'll write a good long letter to Mammie. Hugh will hear all about our journey from her, you know."

They were soon in the very pretty little sitting-room. Emily wrote her letter; Gwenevere began

one, but it made her tearful, and so Emily begged her to read instead. When the breakfast bell rang they went down together, and found Lady Le Mesurier in the breakfast-room.

"Dressed already!" she said. "I was just about to send you your breakfasts, for I fancied you would not be up yet, you were so tired last night. But you look thoroughly rested now, I must confess."

"We are used to early hours," Emily replied. "I have written quite a long letter to Mrs. Darnell already."

"And you, Gweneveré?" said Lady Le Mesurier, turning to the other girl; "I hope you are feeling quite yourself to-day?"

"I am quite well, thank you," answered Gwennie, in the soft low voice which Lady Le Mesurier had hardly heard yet. As she spoke, Gweneveré looked up, and Emily perceived that her Aunt started and gazed earnestly at her, but she made no remark.

"Suppose we have the carriage after breakfast, and give up a morning to shopping," she said presently. "Living so quietly, and in so out-of-the-way a place as Silverton, you will certainly want some pretty dresses; for Fairminster is a gay place in a sober way, and you must 'be gay, too, of course. Tell me, what dresses have you?"

"We have been in mourning, you know, and

our coloured things were not worth bringing. We have two black dresses each, and the white ones we wore last night."

"Well, you may lay aside your mourning now. You want a good many things. I hope you like shopping?"

"I never was much tried," said Emily, brightly, "but I'm sure I shall like it when I have plenty of money. That would make all the difference."

"And you, Gwenevere?"

"I—do not much care, Lady Le Mesurier."

"Are you afraid of me, my dear, or are you always as silent as you are to-day?"

"I think I am always rather silent," Gwenevere answered, seriously.

"Yet you are wonderfully like our family, and the Athelings have the name of being great talkers."

"Gwenevere can talk as much as any one," remarked Emily, "only she is shy at first; and don't believe her, Lady Le Mesurier, that she does not care for pretty dresses, because she likes them very well."

"We may order the carriage, then. Emily, you are my Niece, you know; why do you not call me Aunt?"

"May I?" the girl said, turning her bright face towards the speaker. "Aunt Gundreda, am I to

say? And may Gwen call you Aunt, too? for it would make us feel more at home."

"Very well; I hope she will, then. I begin to think I shall be proud of my nieces. Gundred—that is the everyday form of my very hideous but ancient name. When we were all young, my brothers used to make rhymes about me—'Miss Gundred is worth a hundred of Miss Etheldred with her red head'—that was your mother, Emily."

"I did not inherit the red head," replied Emily.

"It was a libel on poor Ethel," said Lady Le Mesurier; and Emily saw that she glanced at Gwenevere and seemed thoughtful.

They drove to Fairminster, and when they reached the town, the Cathedral bells were ringing for the morning service. As the widow of a Dean, Lady Le Mesurier always went to the Cathedral if she happened to be in town when it was open for service; but she felt doubtful to-day, and looked critically at her two wards to see if she cared to present them to the eyes of Fairminster in their present attire. But it so happened that one of the ambitions of Emily's life had been to possess a seal-skin jacket and cap, and almost the first use she had made of her new wealth was to send to London for the desired articles, one for herself and one for Gwenevere. Great had been the laughter at Silverton at the idea of buying seal-skin jackets

in July; but as Emily had not failed to remark, they "came in" nicely now. Arrayed in these, it did not matter so much that the black skirts that showed beneath were shorter than fashion dictated. The feet too, were too pretty to be spoiled by the country-made boots. Only the gloves were wrong—but they were very dreadful: actually woollen abominations, with no merit save warmth and comfort. But a moment's thought discovered a way of remedying this without offending the young ladies, which she was most anxious not to do. She stopped the carriage at a shop door presently, saying—

"Do not get out; I think we ought to go to the Cathedral, as the bells are actually ringing. Wait for me for five minutes."

When she returned, she carried in her hand three pairs of kid gloves, with seal-skin trimmings.

"Your pretty jackets reminded me of these gloves, which will look so well with them. I hope I have got the right sizes. Put them on; this is my first present to you since I used to send you dolls and bonbons occasionally. And not to be outdone by my nieces, I bought a pair for myself."

"O thank you, Aunt Gundred! Gwennie, are they not pretty? and so soft and warm. My hand feels like a bird in a nice warm nest."

"Indeed, you are very kind," said Gwenever, —the first spontaneous words she had uttered in Lady Le Mesurier's hearing.

"Gwen! Gwen! what is that? Oh, is it not beautiful?"

"That" was the Cathedral—they had just turned into the spacious square in which it stood. Gwenevere gazed—and sighed.

"How Hugh would admire this!" she said.

Privately, Emily thought she might as well have abstained from mentioning Hugh's name; but she would not betray the feeling.

"Yes, indeed he would. Aunt Gundred, is not the music here considered very fine? Mr. Darnell said he thought it was."

"You are musical then? Yes, the Fairminster Choir is thought very good; wonderful, for a choir in this part of the world, where the boys do not sing by nature and inheritance as they do in the North."

"They don't sing by nature in Derbyshire," said Emily; "Gwen and I had hard work with our Choir."

The carriage stopped as she spoke, and they all entered the grand old building. A grand building to Emily then; but it became something more like a friend to her before she left Fairminster.

They had hardly taken their seats when the clergy and choir began to pass up the central aisle. The girls, who had never been in a Cathedral before, were looking on, impressed and pleased,

when Lady Le Mesurier whispered to Gwenevere, who was next to her, "that is the Bishop, Bishop Warner, and that is Dean Eustace."

But Gwenevere turned on her a look of such unfeigned horror and surprise that she ceased her explanations, half amused and half indignant. She was amused too, to watch the effect of the music upon the two young faces—how they listened with eyes, heart, and strength, as well as with ears. Gwenevere's colour deepened; Emily, on the contrary, turned pale, and they pressed nearer to each other as if half frightened.

When the service was over, and they stood once more in the open air, Emily said, absently—

"Are we going home now?"

"Home, my dear child! why, we have not even begun the business we came to do!"

"The shopping! I had forgotten it. I feel as if I would rather go home."

"My dear, there is service every day, and I always go, if in town; so when will you get your shopping done?"

"That is true," said Emily, laughing. "Come then.—Gwen, did you ever even dream of anything like that?"

"Never! I do not believe in it now," Gwenevere answered.

"Wait—stop a moment!" cried a sharp voice

behind them ; and Mrs. Appleby, with her black shawl floating wildly, owing to the rapidity of her movements, came panting up.

"I saw you in Church—thought I should never get down in time : I was in the organ loft, for I wanted to ask Mr. Jessop a question. So these are your young wards ? How do you like our Cathedral, young ladies ?"

She stared from one to the other in undisguised curiosity.

"They are quite charmed," said Lady Le Mesurier. "I must introduce them to you. This is Miss Atheling,—this, Miss Fane. Girls, this is my friend, Mrs. Appleby."

"And so you like the service—eh ?"

"Indeed we do ; the music is so beautiful."

"I don't agree with you ; the music has been going down ever since Dean Eustace came here. His chanting is like a rusty wheel, all creak and squeak."

"I liked it," said Emily, quietly ; while Gwen even lifted her serious blue eyes and looked wonderingly at the rude little woman. Mrs. Appleby laughed, and said to Lady Le Mesurier—

"Send them to the carriage ; I want a word with you. Sir Clarence was in town yesterday, and went to the Fairfords'. He did not stay long. I met him as he came out, and he just looked vexed, but not

very. I said, 'Is Mrs. Fairford at home? for I want to ask her if she has heard from Mary; for my daughter has not written to me since she had her friend to chat with.' And he answered quite carelessly. You may be easy about that; you were quite in time. And these girls, what do you think of them?"

"To begin with, I think them very pretty; in fact, Gwenevere is really lovely."

"Emily is much the best looking, you know. The question is, have they any sense?"

"It is too soon to decide that question; but what is of more immediate consequence, my dear Janet, is, that they have no clothes! and we are bound upon a shopping expedition. Come to-morrow and dine with me, and then you can judge for yourself."

She followed the girls to the carriage and drove off. Mrs. Appleby trotted home, well pleased. "Dear Gundred" was evidently pleased with her generalship about Mary Fairford, who never knew, poor girl, to whose kind offices she was indebted for the somewhat unwelcome invitation to visit Laura Morphy, Mrs. Appleby's married daughter, and her old school-fellow. She had not been able to find a satisfactory excuse, however, and so she was gone; and Mrs. Appleby felt that she deserved well of "dear Gundred," whose Christian name she frequently used when not in the owner's presence.



CHAPTER V.

THE THIN END OF THE WEDGE.

THE shopping expedition was most successful. Accustomed to dress on twenty pounds a year, the two girls felt as if they were getting a supply of clothes to last for the remainder of their natural lives, even supposing they lived to a good old age; and they were a little horrified at the fearful extravagance. But it was pleasant too, in a way,—and they both liked the idea of being so well dressed: what girl does not? Gwenevere would have remonstrated more than once, but Emily contrived to stop her; afterwards, when they were resting from the fatigues of the morning in their little sitting-room, displaying such of their purchases as they had brought home to the delighted Patty, whose dressmaking soul was much uplifted, Gwenevere said—

"You would not let me speak, Emily, but I do think that brown silk was too extravagant. Twenty pounds for one dress! when only last year twenty pounds was all we had to dress upon!"

"Just so!" replied Emily; "but it seems to me, Gwen, that now, when we have plenty of money, it would be wrong to dress upon twenty pounds. How you do open your eyes!"

"And well I may! Wrong to be self-denying and plain in one's dress?"

"When you put it in that way you puzzle me," Emily said, thoughtfully. "What I meant was, that we must try to enlarge our ideas to suit our circumstances. Yes, I *do* think we ought to suit ourselves to our place in life, and that the plain dresses which were so nice at dear old Silverton would look—*do* look, for I saw it myself—out of place here. But you are much more gooderer, Gwen, than I am, so I wish, if you really think it was wrong, that I hadn't stopped you when you were going to resist the silks. I'm afraid I wished for them."

"If I had spoken, perhaps Lady—Aunt Gundred, I mean—would have been angry. So it was just as well."

"Oh, if I were sure we were in the right I should not much mind her anger. Gwen, I should like to go to that glorious, lovely Cathedral every day. •It

would do us good. I wonder if we may.▲ Aunt Gundred only goes if she happens to be in town."

"It would be a great comfort," Gwenevere answered. "I should miss the daily service very much—and that was like what I fancy the music will be in heaven."

"We'll see what she will say to us. Can you tell me why she so particularly wanted us to have those white merino dresses with the pretty fur trimming sent home on Wednesday night?"

"I don't know—and the hats with the same trimming. I could not imagine why."

"I can tell you, Miss Emily," said Patty, recovering from a trance of ecstasy into which she had fallen over two velveteen skirts, which she was to make into complete dresses. "My lady has what the servants here call an 'at home,' every Thursday: ever so many people come at about three o'clock, and they have tea and coffee, and ices in summer, and they walk in the garden and play croquet. And they go away before dinner."

"Oh, how pleasant!" cried Emily, her eyes brightening.

"Every one likes it, Miss," replied Patty. "May I take these away now, Miss, and cut the linings? then I can fit them on when I am dressing you for dinner."

That evening the girls felt much more at home than they had expected to be in so short a time. Even Gwenevere was forgetting her shyness. They sang a duet for their Aunt after dinner, and she was delighted, declaring that their music would form "quite a feature" on her Thursdays. "But I remember," she added, "Mrs. Darnell was a first-rate musician."

"She says Gwenevere has a finer voice than she ever had!" cried Emily, triumphantly. "It is well that the little I have is contralto, because we can sing duets; but Gwen, sing one of your *grand* songs now. Show what you can do, my dear, in the canary-bird line."

Gwenevere was still shy enough to begin very badly, but she soon forgot herself in her song, and rather surprised Lady Le Mesurier.

"Why, my dear," said she, "such a voice is thrown away on a girl like you—you ought to be on the stage!"

"On the stage!" repeated Gwenevere, in accents of horror.

Lady Le Mesurier laughed. "You little Puritan, how easily shocked you are! And you, Emily,—are you horrified too?"

"I should not like to be an actress," said Emily, thoughtfully; "but I'm sure an actress might be a very good, industrious woman."

"Oh, Emily!" cried Gwenevere; "and Hugh said——"

"Yes," interrupted Emily, "I know he thinks very differently. But I was only saying what I think, and you know one can't help thinking for one's self."

"Cannot one?" said Lady Le Mesurier, dryly. "I suspect you can, Gwenevere."

Both the girls looked at her, puzzled.

"Do you think I was wrong, Aunt Gundred?" said Emily, at last.

"No. I agree with you."

"But I mean, in thinking for myself?"

"About that, my dear, I did not offer an opinion. You said no one could help thinking for themselves—I said I thought that Gwenevere could help it. Am I right, Emily?"

"Gwenevere is as good as gold," said Emily, still puzzled; "ever so much better than I am. Mrs. Darnell always said I was opinionated, and I suppose I am."

"I should not have found it out, Emily, I must confess. Do you never sing alone?"

"Yes—ballads, and *little* things. Shall I sing 'Douglas,' for you? it suits my voice."

Gwenevere, who was still at the piano, began to play the accompaniment, and Emily sang the sorrowful old song,—not really old, I believe, but the

writer has done what few can do—written a ballad fit to be compared with the old ones.

"My dear child, you have actually made me cry!" exclaimed Lady Le Mesurier. "One would fancy you had felt all that—which I am quite sure you have not."

"No," said Emily, laughing. Then suddenly going over and standing before her Aunt, she said, "Aunt Gundred, I want to tell you that I must write to Claud."

"Who is Claud?" inquired my lady, to gain time, for she was taken by surprise.

"Claud Beresford. You know about him."

"Yes—— Well, I think it would be wiser if you did not, I confess."

"But I must!"

"If you *must*, why ask my leave?"

"I did not ask—I only wanted you to know."

"I do not approve—neither do I forbid it. Thinking, as I do, that you will most likely outlive this girlish fancy, my chief anxiety is to save you from trouble and annoyance hereafter. You have made him understand my views?"

"Quite. And he said that you were right. He himself said that I was free."

"Then why write to him—keeping up a kind of hope, you know?"

"Don't be angry, Aunt Gundred, if I say that

I mean to—to do it again,—be engaged to him, I mean, as soon as I can."

"That is all in the future. At present you are not engaged to Mr. Beresford ; but he is your old friend and companion, and if you like to write to him occasionally, I cannot help it. But I warn you against raising hopes which my experience tells me you will never fulfil."

"I will not do that. I promise you to raise no hopes which I don't mean to fulfil."

"I begin to think that Mrs. Darnell is right, and that you are opinionated, Miss Emily. But I hope that Gwenevere, who is not opinionated, will be guided by my wishes. I can say no more on the subject."

"I speak for Gwennie as well, as for myself," said Emily.

"No, no, she must speak, or be silent, for herself," said Lady Le Mesurier.

Gwenevere only blushed crimson—she did not speak. The girls both wrote, with this difference : Emily wrote one long letter, weekly, with a good conscience, and Gwenevere wrote nearly every day, and felt guilty. Emily urged her to speak again on the subject, but she had not the courage to do so.

Next morning, when breakfast was over, Lady Le Mesurier said—

"As we hope to form one family for some time, it will be more pleasant to arrange our day so as to suit each other."

"Which means," thought Emily, privately, "that we must arrange our days to suit you!"

"I always see my cook and give orders to the servants, at this time; write letters, etc. So you must amuse yourselves until luncheon time. After that, I generally drive out. The whole house is at your disposal, except my private sitting-room. Perhaps you would like to practise; it will not disturb me."

"But may we go out? We are used to long walks, and we like it. And may we go into Fairminster and attend the service?"

"Of course, if you wish. Take your maid with you, or I will send Hortense if you prefer her. She knows the way."

"No; Patty will enjoy it," said Emily. "But—we never had a servant with us, at home."

"It would not do for you, to go alone now, believe me. You will be very tired, I fear."

"Tired! I don't think it is more than a mile."

"About a mile, I believe. There are lovely walks on the moor, for those who like walking. But do not forget, you must have a servant with you."

"I will not forget," Emily answered, "and it will do Patty good."

"And be home in time for luncheon—two o'clock, remember." And Lady Le Mesurier gathered up her letters, her keys, and her gloves, and departed to her private "sanctum."

"Is not this lovely?" cried Emily,—“perfect freedom from ten till two—one, two, three, four whole hours. Gwen, don't lose a moment. We'll go and tell Patty to get ready, and then go and explore the garden till she comes out.”

Patty, who had quite forgotten her wish to go home, was delighted to find that she was to attend “her young ladies,” as she was beginning to call them; and the party was soon on the way to Fairminster.

Mrs. Appleby arrived at Moorside at about one o'clock.

“I saw your two young ladies in the Cathedral,” she said, “so I came out at once to secure a quiet chat with you. What do you think of them?”

“They are nice girls—ladylike and well educated. Gwenevere is a good little thing, but Emily amuses me. She says everything that comes into her head, and asks my leave to do this or that, as if she were about thirteen: while all the time she is quite determined to have her own way, if she can get it.”

“They are pretty girls,” said Mrs. Appleby,

"Emily decidedly pretty. By the way, do you remember the photographs you once showed me? I shall never trust a photograph again."

Lady Le Mesurier opened a cabinet, and took out the little wooden box in which the photographs had been sent to her. She tumbled the contents out upon the table. •The two young ladies in the pictures were not only plain, but they had none of the air of distinction possessed by the supposed originals. The two small locks of hair were in the box also.

"This photograph," said Lady Le Mesurier, "was never done for Gwenevere. It is only two years ago, and those very regular features of hers were probably just the same then as they are now. Emily has improved wonderfully, if this was ever like her. The more I look at them, the more convinced I am that there was some—mistake. I *don't* think Mrs. Darnell capable of such a thing—to prevent me taking the girls away?"

"There is surely some mistake," said Mrs. Appleby, taking up the pictures. "This *may* be Miss Atheling—those fair insipid girls are so changeable,—but this was *never* done for Miss Fane."

Lady Le Mesurier laughed.

"All right, Janet. We are agreed on the whole. I must remark also, that if this lock of hair was

really cut at haphazard from Gwenevere's head, the chance was an unlucky one."

"Why, her hair is red, surely?"

"Oh yes, if you like to call it so. There is the bell. I hope the girls have come home."

Not only had they come home, but they were already in the dining-room, when the two ladies entered it. Lady Le Mesurier had the two photographs in her hand.

"Emily, do you see that?" whispered Gwenevere.

"What? I see nothing."

"The photographs!" exclaimed Gwenevere, in dismay: but Miss Emily no sooner understood, than she prepared for a bit of fun: for I must confess that the little sinner was not a bit afraid nor in the least repentant. As soon as the servants had left the room, Lady Le Mesurier placed the photographs before Gwenevere, and said—

"Do you recognize these, my dear?"

"Yes," said Gwenevere, colouring.

"Do you consider them good likenesses?"

"Yes — no — yes," said Gwenevere, getting puzzled; for they were good likenesses, but not of herself and Emily.

"And you think them good likenesses too, I suppose?" went on Lady Le Mesurier, turning to Emily. Emily took out her glasses, perched them upon her impertinent nose, and replied—

"Very good indeed. But I didn't know that you knew the Vincents, Aunt Gundred."

"The Vincents—who are they? These photographs are supposed to represent yourself and Gwenevere, as you appeared two years ago."

"My dear Aunt," said Emily gravely, "some one has been playing you a trick. We all had them done at the same time; but this is Maria Vincent, and this, Bertha,—friends of ours at Silverton."

"Some one *has* been playing me a trick," said Lady Le Mesurier, significantly. "I can guess who, but not why."

"It must have been Mr. Darnell," said Emily. And then the two girls burst into irrepressible fits of laughing at the idea of grave, simple-minded Mr. Darnell playing tricks upon any one.

"To make me willing to leave you there, was it, Emily? Not very upright of the Darnells."

Emily was grave in a moment.

"You must not fancy that—and you don't, you horrid Aunt Gundred, for I see you smiling. You know well enough that it was my doing. We were frightened out of our senses at the idea that you would send for us,—you know we had never seen you then. Mrs. Darnell said you would—and so—I hid the right photographs and sent you those."

"Emily, Emily, I ought to be very angry with

you. I could be, too, when I think how well it would have been for all concerned if you had left Silverton two years ago. Vincent—did you say Vincent?" she added, in a tone of astonishment.

"Yes," answered both girls at once. Lady Le Mesurier looked at the pictures—then at Gwenevere—then raised her eyebrows, and smiled a little half-amused, half-pitying smile. The girls were both crimson and indignant, but as she did not say a word, they were obliged to be silent also. Mrs. Appleby, ever ready to forward her friend's projects, asked—

"Friends of yours, young ladies, you say? if so, I must make no remarks; but I think Mrs. Darnell must have forgotten who you are—eh?"

"That does not matter now, Janet, so long as they do not forget it themselves," said Lady Le Mesurier, gravely.

Poor Gwenevere! her hands trembled, her eyes filled with tears, and after a vain attempt to compose herself, she got up and hurried from the room.

"Emily," said Lady Le Mesurier, "*is it possible* that——"

Emily looked up, her bright eyes filled with anger.

"Aunt Gundred, we are not alone. Yes, you are right; and, *indeed*, I am punished for my idle trick."

She ran off after Gwenevere, carrying with her the two unlucky photographs.

"Gwennie dear, why did you run away? It looked just as if you were ashamed of Hugh."

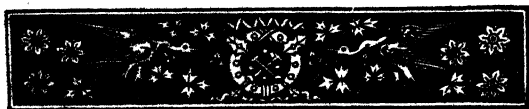
"Not of Hugh," said Gwenevere in a low voice. "But, Emily, I do feel ashamed of those photographs."

"Then you ought to be ashamed of yourself!" exclaimed Emily, hotly; "it is just the same thing, and *I* am ashamed of *you*. I shall put Maria and Bertha up here on the mantel-piece, and so every one may see that we don't mean to forget old friends."

"What did you think of that?" said Lady Le Mesurier to her friend, when Emily had disappeared.

"You will not succeed with Emily," was the reply.

"*I will*," answered the other lady, emphatically, "with both. Emily is brilliant and clever; she will soon give up the wish to marry an obscure curate. It may take time and patience, but she is still very young. I am going to have Harold here, —my nephew, you know. It will be good for them to see what a man in their own rank is like, before time has softened the outline of the Vincent type in their memory. As to Gwenevere, I have got in the thin end of the wedge there, if I mistake not."



CHAPTER VI.

THE FIRST THURSDAY.

THURSDAY arrived in due course. The white merinos had come home the evening before, and the girls were dressing themselves for the afternoon. It was a lovely day—bright and pleasant. The white, soft, warm-looking dresses, all trimmed with snowy swansdown, were most becoming. Emily declared that Gwenevere looked like a queen, and that she only wished that Hugh could see her. They were nearly ready, when Hortense knocked at the door.

"My Lady sent me to offer to dress Miss Atheling's hair," said the Frenchwoman, who spoke English perfectly, having even mastered the difficult "th." "Oh!" she continued, looking at Gwenevere, "you ought always to wear white, Mademoiselle; you are charming, charming. All except your hair. It is too tight, too—what you

call tidy, for your style. May I have the pleasure of dressing it for you?"

Gwenevere was well content, and the Frenchwoman led her off to her own room (she and Emily had been dressing together), and having carefully covered the pretty dress with a loose dressing-gown, she proceeded to let down the lustrous, rich-coloured waves of the girl's hair, and to put it up again in a manner which showed off every shade in it, and which was, moreover, most becoming to the sweet, gentle face.

"Now, look at yourself, Miss Atheling. Now your beautiful hair is what it ought to be, an addition to the effect of your beauty. You English, you treat the hair as something apart; it should, on the contrary, be always in subjection to the face. You are very, very lovely, Mademoiselle," she added slowly. Gwenevere blushed, but not angrily.

"You must not flatter me, Hortense," she said.

"I do not flatter. I do but speak my mind. I should like to dress your hair always—to dress you altogether always. With my Lady, one has no scope for one's abilities; she looks ever the same. Let me alter this lace frill; it is too high. Ah—so. That is better."

Gwenevere went back to Emily's room, followed by Hortense.

"Won't you dress Emily's hair, too?" she said.

"It is not necessary. Miss Fane's hair takes its own way, and it suits her. My Lady is in the drawing-room by this time, and I see a carriage at the gate."

The girls ran downstairs, Emily whispering, "Hortense does not think much of me; I feel extinguished."

People had already begun to arrive. Lady Le Mesurier watched her two wards closely, and was satisfied; unconventional they might be occasionally, but never unladylike. Gentle Mrs. Eustace lost her heart to them, and invited them to visit her, telling them that she had a poor girl at home, to whom an occasional visit would be a real kindness. The day was warm enough for croquet, and the young part of the guests were delighted to find that the new-comers could play, and play very well, too; Emily throwing her whole heart into it, as she did into most things. Her partner, Mrs. Eustace's son, was in great delight, and as the game drew near an end, he called to her—

"That's Kennedy's ball, Miss Fane! Have no mercy. If you don't send him about his business he may beat us yet; he has beaten me every game we have played this year."

"But I'll defeat him!" cried Emily, with a little flourish of her mallet; and next moment—alas!

that the mysteries of croquet are so nearly forgotten now that her feat will not be appreciated as it ought—Mr. Kennedy uttered a howl of despair, as he ran to seek his ball in distant recesses of the shrubbery.

"Well done, well done!" cried the players; and one voice joined in the applause which was new to Emily, even among all the new voices. Turning quickly, she saw a tall, dark young man, with a peculiarly lazy, and even apathetic expression of countenance, leaning against a tree in an easy attitude, and staring point-blank at her in a manner of which she did not approve. She had been flourishing her mallet in triumph, looking very animated and bright, but that bold, admiring gaze quenched her at once. She won her game as quickly as possible, and refused to play again.

"No, no; get some one else to play," she said. "I am by way of being at home, you know, so I must not play *every* game. Miss Eustace, will you come and see the late roses I was telling you of? They are at the other side of the garden."

"Miss Fane, my Lady begs you to go to her for a minute," said a servant, just as Emily and Miss Eustace were moving off.

"Wait for me one moment," she said, and ran lightly over the grass to where, among the flower-beds, "my Lady" was holding her court. She

seldom left the comfortable drawing-room on these occasions, but to-day, anxiety to see how the two girls were getting on had drawn her out into the pleasure-ground. Emily, running quickly, thought that there was nothing between her and her Aunt ; but behold, there was a flower-bed, which she did not perceive until she was quite too close to it to check herself. To trample down the flowers was impossible, so, without thinking, Emily sprang right over it, alighting before her Aunt as neatly as possible.

"Well done—well done again," said the voice she had heard before ; and there stood the stranger with the unpleasant habit of staring, to which sin he was now adding, what she privately called "an impertinent grin,"—most people, she found afterwards, termed it a fascinating smile.

"My dear Emily," said Lady Le Mesurier, laughing, "it is very plain that you are fresh from the country. Such a spring, child ! and you don't seem in the least heated by it. Gwenevere is a much more dignified personage than you are. Here she comes ; I want to introduce you both to your Cousin Harold—Colonel Atheling."

Emily turned in dismay—was the staring man her Cousin ? No ; by Lady Le Mesurier's side stood a very different-looking person : a tall, fair man, handsome, in the fair Atheling style ; a

remarkably pleasant voice and easy manner, but deferential and quiet to a degree. There was nothing in his appearance to proclaim him a soldier—but a soldier he was, and had even distinguished himself.

“Harold arrived just now, and I thought you would like to make his acquaintance at once. But you were playing, were you not? This,”—turning to the starrer,—“is my nephew, Sir Clarence Le Mesurier. He plays croquet sometimes.”

“I have not finished my game yet,” said Gwenevere, giving her hand to Sir Clarence as she had done to her cousin: but Emily merely bowed to him, and said—

“I am going to show Miss Eustace those wonderful roses, Aunt Gundred.”

“Take me with you,” said Colonel Atheling. “English roses are a treat to me, you know.”

He walked beside her, and Sir Clarence followed, saying—

“English roses attract me too—though not those which grow upon bushes.”

Emily made no sign of hearing this remark, but walked on with her small nose in the air. The roses were inspected—apparently Sir Clarence thought he had said all that the occasion required, for except a lazy “How do?” to some of the guests, he did not speak again. Colonel Atheling was

very pleasant ; friendly in his manner, but always with that grand air of deferential chivalry which became him so well. Gwenevere found them after a time, and the whole party sauntered about very pleasantly, until the assembly began to break up. The girls were both well pleased to find that Colonel Atheling had come to stay for some time. Mrs. Appleby was not asked to stay to dinner, which she felt was unkind : so she revenged herself by whispering to her dear friend—

"Take care—you'll have both your nephews wanting to marry Miss Fane ! I don't wonder though—she is so *very* pretty."

Lady Le Mesurier only smiled serenely. Very soon Harold was the only person left in the drawing-room with her, for the girls had run off to their own rooms, there to rest and enjoy that exhaustive "talk over" the pleasures of the day, which makes up more than half the pleasantness.

"Well, my dear Harold, I have hardly had time to look at you. Pray, Sir, how have you managed to keep your fair complexion in India ?"

"Every one asks me that question ! I never burn—tan—whatever you call it. *You* have not changed in the least, Aunt Gundred ; you look remarkably well. Now my poor father is a perfect wreck."

"Egbert is twenty years older than I am in

health, though not half that in years ; but, then, he gives himself no chance, leading such a strange life. I believe he never even sits down to a regular meal—is that true ? ”

“ Upon my word, I believe it is ; though, of course, while I was there things were different. He is very anxious for me to marry—says I am the last of the family, and that I ought to think seriously of it. I am thirty-five, you know—getting up in years.”

“ Quite ancient. And what do you think about it yourself ? Did Egbert say nothing more on this subject ? ”

“ He did. He told me that he greatly wishes me to marry Miss Atheling, your ward, if I find that I can like her. He explained to me that her estate is really an integral part of Saxelby, which it was a sin to divide,—some doting parent did it for a favourite son, I fancy ? ”

“ Your great-grandfather. It would be very desirable to reunite it to Saxelby.”

“ Undoubtedly. I promised to speak to you about it, if I found the young lady presentable.”

“ And she is more than that.”

“ Yes ; she is really beautiful. That quiet, dignified manner, and that slow, soft smile, take my fancy greatly. She is quite my ideal of a wife, do you know ? ”

“ I am glad to hear it, for I should be very glad

to see her your wife ; but, Harold, don't make too sure of her. You will have difficulties."

"Give me a map of the country, Aunt Gundred. I rather like overcoming difficulties, do you know?"

Perhaps she did !

"I blame myself for them," she went on in a meditative voice ; "but, indeed, it was principally that monkey's doing—Emily Fane, I mean. Do you admire Emily?"

"Greatly. A bright little creature. But what has she to do with this matter?"

"You know the girls have been educated by Mrs. Darnell, poor Ethel's old governess—young governess rather, for she is still only a middle-aged woman. Very well she had taught them too : they are thoroughly well educated. But, of course, they have been like daughters of the house. They had only about a hundred a year each, you know ; and so it really seemed a good thing that they were happy and contented. But I do blame myself a little for having left them there so long." And my Lady's air of self-reproach was really touching.

"Such pretty girls, too," remarked Harold ; "why not give them a chance?"

"I meant to do so. When they were about eighteen, I wrote to Mrs. Darnell, asking her to send me really good photographs of them. She had the likenesses done ; but, unfortunately, she

said to the girls that, when I had seen them, I would probably insist upon taking them away from her. And Miss Emily, not caring to leave Silver-ton, where she was extremely happy, exchanged the photographs for those of two girls, friends and neighbours of theirs, whose personal appearance by no means tempted me to undertake the charge of them,—thick-set, clumsy-looking girls, you know, with high-piled hair and obtrusive hands. But I *am* surprised that I did not suspect a mistake, for it would have been odd, indeed, if a Fane or an Atheling had contrived to look like that. However, I was very busy, and only half liked the idea of taking charge of these two penniless girls, who would, of course, become fixtures here if they did not marry.” •

“And this was Miss Fane’s doing? Miss Atheling had nothing to say to it?”

“Nothing whatever. She seemed greatly distressed about it,” answered Lady Le Mesurier, feelingly. •

“Ah; well, it becomes plain to me that Miss Fane likes her own way. My wife must have no ‘own way’ to like: she must follow mine. And a trick of that kind—— No, Miss Fane is very pretty and pleasant, but—— After all, however, no great harm has been done, as far as I can see.” •

“But, indeed, you are mistaken; harm has been

done, though I have good hope that it may be undone. Mr. Darnell has a nephew, and the young ladies whose likenesses so daunted me have a brother. I have steadily refused to permit anything to be said about these heroes, but there has been some mutual admiration. Of course, as things were, it would not have mattered, but now, the girls being so well off, and so fitted to fill higher positions, I am greatly vexed. Still, I have no fears. The poor children led a dull life, and had never seen any one else ; now, when they contrast—— Oh, I feel certain it needs only time and a little management."

Colonel Atheling looked very grave.

"To which is Gwenevere supposed to have inclined?" said he.

"To Mr. Vincent—a soldier. In a line regiment, I believe."

"Naturally. What else is he—— I mean, as to position, fortune, etc.?"

"Literally nothing. His father is a farmer, and he is the second son."

"Ah, I see. A fellow that a Miss Atheling ought not to marry in *any* case. It is a pity that you did not prevent such a misfortune; even if penniless, she ought to have been seen to, for the honour of the name."

Lady Le Mesurier submitted to this rebuke with unwonted meekness.

"Is there any engagement?" asked her nephew.

"Of *course* not," she answered quickly. "The only danger is lest she should feel a sentimental obligation to remember him. I suspect *she is* sentimental. Emily, too, who has more spirit, would use her influence in his favour, I think."

"Hers is a less hopeful case, then?"

"Well, it will take longer. Emily is self-willed, I can see already. Gwenevere is one of those gentle, pliant, clinging women, who always *are* guided by some will stronger than their own. Just now, of course, it is Emily's, though I don't think either of them is aware of it. If you try to make it so, Harold, it will soon be yours."

"I will think it over. I have always said that my wife should be a girl fresh from the school-room, principally because I wished to be undoubtedly the first in the field."

"Gwenevere may be said to be fresh from the school-room, I think; for she is young, even for her years. As to this flirtation,—my dear boy, believe me, you will find it very difficult to discover a girl who has never fancied that she fancied some one!"

"Perhaps; but at least I should not know it. However, my father is very anxious for it. Yes, I think I really ought to try. My enemies are, you think, a sentimental turn of mind in the young

lady herself, and a traitor in the camp in the very pretty form of my Cousin Emily Fane."

"And your allies are, time, the girl's own good sense, and, last, but not least, your affectionate Aunt. You mean to try, then?"

"Victory, or Westminster Abbey," answered he, lazily. "Oh, yes, I mean to try. She is exactly what I like, except for this affair. That is hard to swallow, I confess."

Then he rose, stretched himself, and added—

"I must have a cigar before dinner; so farewell, Aunt Gundred, for a time."

Lady Le Mesurier sat alone for some time meditating.

"Yes, that will do nicely," said she, presently; and rising, she sailed away to her own room.

Now let us see what Gwenevere and Emily have been talking about all this time. First Patty was summoned, the white dresses taken off and laid by with reverent affection; new dresses were solemn things as yet, to these unsophisticated damsels. Dressing-gowns were put on, and then, Patty being left to arrange things at her leisure, four small feet were comfortably set to toast before a bright fire in the sitting-room, and two tongues began to wag. Alone with Emily, Gwenevere could chatter away, when she had something new to talk about. The difference was, that Emily always had something new to talk about.

"Oh, Emily, was it not very pleasant?"

"Was it not? Everybody seems inclined to be so friendly; and there is something—a kind of manner, you know, as if they were always the same, and never stopped to think how they ought to behave—that is very delightful. Oh, Gwen, if this is society, I confess I *love* society. When I said I hated it"—Gwen wondered when she had said it,—“I thought of balls, and you and I longing to dance and getting no partners because nobody knew us.”

“And dinner-parties,” added Gwennie, “with stupid neighbours who expected us to talk.”

“I can always talk,” answered Emily, with charming frankness; “with me, my dear, the difficulty is to hold my tongue. Do you like our Cousin, Gwen?”

“I do, indeed. But, Emily, one would never know that he is a soldier.”

“My dear,” said Emily, solemnly, “don’t say that except to me. For *I* said it to Mr. Frank Eustace, and he replied, ‘Look like a soldier! Miss Fane, I am amazed at you. In what remote and uncivilized quarter of the world did you acquire your ideas? I suppose Colonel Atheling would faint if he fancied for a moment that he betrayed his profession by his looks; he’d say, “Nothing so low as to smell of the shop.”’ So, as I thought

this a little saucy, I just said, 'Oh, excuse me, Mr. Eustace, I really cannot imagine Colonel Atheling using that expression,' and took no further notice of what he had said."

"Hugh looks like a soldier, though," remarked Gwenevere, in a low voice, and glancing round as if afraid of being overheard.

"You'd better write and tell him to leave off at once; say it's incorrect, and you can't have it. Hugh *may* look like a soldier, but he never had such a frown on his pleasant face as Colonel Atheling bestowed upon Carlo when he jumped up on him—not that Carlo had any business in the garden. The only person, Gwen, that I don't like, is Sir Clarence. I know I am going to hate him."

"But why? I only saw him for a few minutes?"

"He stares, and he pays compliments. I hate that. I am *not* a fool, so why should he behave as if I were?"

"Well, but if he admired you, Emily? Is there any harm in that?"

"None; only in thinking that I care to be told about it. And, indeed, I suppose it is the way the thing is said that makes one angry."

"I like Mrs. Eustace," Gwenevere went on. "But what was that she said about a poor girl whom we ought to visit?"

"Miss Eustace told me; there is another sister,

and she is deformed, poor thing. We must go and see her, Gwen."

"Oh—must we? What good can we do her? And things like that are so dreadful! Is she ill, or only just deformed?"

"She is a terrible sufferer; and she shrinks from seeing people, but Miss Eustace is going to be married, and go to India, and then this poor thing will be so lonely. We must go, in fact I promised we would. It may just be one of the things we were brought here to do."

"Brought here to visit the Eustaces!" exclaimed Gwenevere.

"To lighten this poor thing's life a little, if we may."

"Well, Emily," said Gwenevere, rather angrily for her, "I cannot quite think that we were taken from our happy home and brought here among strangers just for that; and very likely Aunt Gundred may not wish us to go."

"I only said it was *one* of the things, you know. As to Aunt Gundred, why should she dislike it? We can ask her to-night."

"Emily, do you like Mrs. Appleby?"

"Do you?" inquired Emily, gravely.

"N—no; at least, I think not."

"I don't at all agree with you, my dear," said Emily, with a toss of her chin that made her

actually look like Mrs. Appleby. "She's a charming woman—so animated."

Gwenevere laughed. "Oh, Emily, if Aunt Gundred only heard you! They are great friends."

"Not a bit of it, my dear," replied the brisk accents of Mrs. Appleby. "They rather dislike each other, but your Aunt likes being contradicted. That's the only bond between them." Then, in her own voice, "Gwen, we'll call her the 'Animated No.' She reminded me of that line all day."

"What line? I forget."

"This," said Emily.

" ' Discourse may want an animated No,
To brush the surface, and to make it flow ; '

but no discourse ought to flow badly in her presence, that is certain."

Emily leaned back in her chair and fell into a reverie. At last she said—

"Gwennie, we must mind what we are about. This soft, pleasant life will spoil us if we don't. We must find out some poor people to help, something to do that shall not be only amusement, or we shall grow as selfish and idle as that girl in the story—I forget the name—the girl who lay on a sofa and wished for her book* which she had dropped beside her, but could not reach."

"Oh, but that was the bad heroine, you know,"

said Gwennie, laughing; "the example was the energetic Cousin, who afterwards went to India as a Zenana missionary, and married a General."

"Very true; then let us both be energetic Cousins, and I will leave the reward to you. I hope it is a prophecy that Hugh will be a General, only don't keep him waiting until he is, Gwen, for the poor fellow would not like it."

"I don't want to keep him waiting," said Gwenevere, quickly. "It is not my fault. And Emily, how are we to find poor people? Every one about here seems well off. Now, at Silverton, we always knew plenty of people who wanted help."

"We shall find some, never fear. Where there's a will there's a way. One thing we must do, we must arrange about dear Mammie, or we shall have her advertising and getting a whole horrid lot of naughty children to wear her life out, if we don't mind."

Gwenevere did not quite see why the children need all be so horrid, but she acquiesced in the rest of the remark, adding, "Aunt Gundred will not object, I think; for no matter how well she may wish us to dress, we never could spend all our money."

"I don't mean to spend it," said Emily. "Not more than is right and proper. I *will* not spoil myself, Gwenevere, for the life I have chosen. There is a knock.—Come in!"

It was Hortense.

"My Lady will not dress just yet. Miss Atheling, will you allow me to assist you now?"

"Oh no, Gwen; don't go yet. Patty can help us both very well. I will do your hair for you."

"My Lady sent me," remarked Hortense.

"We are very much obliged to her, but we're far too snug to move till we must," answered Emily.

"But thank you very much, Hortense," added Gwenevere. Hortense withdrew, looking decidedly sulky.

"Now what is that woman at?" said Emily.

"Nothing. She is only very obliging. She—she admires me, Emily, and she says I put up my hair badly; and I know I do. I must get a maid who can do it well."

"I *don't* like Hortense, but that may be just my vanity, because she does not admire me! But when you have your own maid, she will have no excuse for prowling about here."

"Poor Hortense! And after all we have gained little by sending her away; for here is Patty, and if we don't dress now we shall be late."





CHAPTER VII.

GWENEVERE'S MAID.

THAT evening passed delightfully. Colonel Atheling sang, and loved music, he said ; and Lady Le Mesurier produced a portfolio full of music of all sorts. Could anything be more pleasant ! They sang, and played, and talked to their hearts' content ; and the clock on the mantelpiece took them quite by surprise by striking eleven. Gwenevere and Emily were too tired after their exciting day to do more than tell each other that their Cousin was a decided acquisition, "though," said Emily, "he has as cross a little frown sometimes as ever I saw !"

The next day, at breakfast, letters were brought in, and behold, there was one for each young lady ; and unmistakably the writing of both letters was masculine. Colonel Atheling was busy with his

own correspondence, but Lady Le Mesurier watched the two girls while pretending to busy herself with hers. Gwenevere blushed painfully, and after looking for some time at the letter as if it would bite her, she nervously put it in her pocket without a word. Emily seized hers at once, sparkled and smiled, then looked over at her Aunt, and said—

"A letter from Claud, Aunt Gundred,"—thereby taking that worthy dame so completely by surprise that she could only nod, and hastily opened another letter. "That child is a complete puzzle to me," she thought to herself. And well might she be so; for never, even when she was a small child in white frocks and blue sashes, had she been as frankly straightforward as Emily Fane was—and would be, let us hope, all her life. For truly that transparent "æfauld" mind is a very beautiful thing; and, moreover, frankness is sometimes better policy than reserve. Emily put her precious letter away, to be read in comfort by-and-by. Presently Colonel Atheling looked up, and said—

"Aunt Gundred, this letter concerns you as much as me. It is from St. John, a friend of mine at present in India. You remember Winthorp, who married Katharine Atheling's daughter?"

"Katharine Atheling?" said Lady Le Mesurier.

"Katharine Grant, I mean,—she had been an

Atheling. This daughter, Ethel Winthorp, is dead—died some years ago—and now Winthorp himself is gone, poor fellow, and there's a little girl six years old left utterly penniless and friendless. She has no relations on the father's side, and none nearer than ourselves on the other. He writes to know what is to become of the child?"

"We must get her home to begin with, and then I can see about getting her into the Officers' Daughters' School, or——"

"Oh, Gwen, is not this just the thing for us?" cried Emily. "Aunt Gundred, Gwennie and I have always meant to speak to you; we want so much to manage so that Mrs. Darnell shall not feel the loss of our income; and then, too, we are so well off and have no claims on us, that surely we ought to undertake the care of this little girl. You will allow us, won't you? And we can send her to dear Mammie, and then all will be right; for we were half afraid she might refuse to accept anything from us."

"My dear child, it is a very kind thought, but we must consider it a little. If you undertake this, you must go on with it, you know, until the child is old enough to become a governess; and though you certainly could afford it, yet the time will come when your income will not appear to you the unlimited wealth you think it now."

"And, moreover, when you follow the example of most young ladies, and get married," said Colonel Atheling, "what will the favoured individual say to your prodigality?"

"He won't say a word against it—they won't, either of them," said Emily. "And it would be impossible for Gwen and me to spend our money altogether on ourselves—it would be wrong; and what better *could* we do with it than this?"

"You are speaking for Gwenevere as well as for yourself," said Lady Le Mesurier. "What say you, Gwenevere?"

"I should like to do this, if we may. It will be the easiest way of helping Mrs. Darnell, which we have always intended to do."

"Well, we will talk it over again. I see no objection, if you are really certain that you will not repent it yourselves."

Then Lady Le Mesurier gathered up her letters and went to her sitting-room. Emily made a sign to Gwenevere, and they both made their escape, Emily whispering, "If we let him begin to talk we shall never get away, and I want to read my letter and go to the Cathedral."

They read their letters, and were getting ready to go out, when Emily suddenly exclaimed—

"How provoking! I quite forgot to ask if there is any reason why we should not pay that visit. I

must run and ask.—Patty, if Miss Atheling is ready before I come back, tell her I shall not be long."

She ran to the door of her Aunt's room and knocked at it, and the door not being well closed, flew open at the touch, disclosing Lady Le Mesurier sitting by the fire with Hortense standing before her. The former was saying—

"You understand what I want, Hortense, and that it is only a temporary—— What do you want, Emily?" she abruptly inquired, looking more put out than seemed necessary.

"I knocked, Aunt Gundred, but the door flew open, it wasn't quite shut. Gwenevere and I want to go to the Deanery after service, if you do not wish us to come home earlier than usual. Mrs. Eustace asked us to go and see her invalid daughter."

"Mrs. Eustace? You'll find it very dull, I suspect. And that poor girl is a terrible object. But I shall be busy until luncheon as usual."

"Very well," said Emily, and ran off to meet Gwenevere and Patty.

They went to the Cathedral as usual, and then followed Mrs. Eustace, who had been there too, in the direction of the Deanery. But Mrs. Eustace reached it long before they did, for they had several delays. First they met Mrs. Appleby.

"Ah ha, young ladies, here you are. Do you

mean to attend the Cathedral service every day?"

"A deluge *might* prevent it," replied Emily.

"Ah, that means, 'Ask me no questions and I'll tell you no lies.' But I really think your Aunt shows less than her usual discretion in letting you go about attended only by that young countrified-looking maid: I must tell her so."

"We ought to be greatly flattered, I suppose, by your interest," answered Emily, feeling very angry. And they both made an effort to pass on.

"Stay a moment. Is your Aunt at home?"

"She was, when we left it."

"And Colonel Atheling means to stay some time, I believe. 'There's a chance for you, young ladies! Such a fine-looking man, a distinguished officer, and said to be the most fastidious man about ladies that ever was known! If *he* admires you, it is indeed a compliment. What—yes, I declare—I do see him! It actually is Sir Clarence Le Mesurier coming out of the centre door. No doubt, young ladies, you *will* attend service every morning. It is evidently becoming quite the fashion."

"Good morning!" said gentle Gwenevere, with such unwonted decision that Emily started. But they got away at last.

"Emily, what an intolerable woman! but, oh, I hope I was not rude?"

"Not half rude enough ; she really wanted a snub badly. Here comes Sir Clarence ; bow, Gwen, and let us get on if we can."

But they could not, for Sir Clarence put himself right in their way, with his hat off, and an appearance of languid pleasure lighting up his somewhat heavy face.

"How do, Miss Atheling ? How do, Miss Fane ? Fine morning—aw—— You've been to the big shop this morning ?"

"No, to no shop at all," said Emily.

"I mean the Cathedral,—call it the big shop, and St. Damien's the little shop, don't you know ?"

"And why do you call them shops, may I ask ?"

"I'm sure I don't know. Some fellow began it, I suppose."

"I hope some fellow will leave it off, then," remarked Emily.

"This fellow will ; I will never call 'em shops again, I promise you. Where are you going, Miss Atheling ?"

"To the Deanery."

"Can't stand the Deanery at this hour : Dean writing his sermon—little girl learning her lessons—sick girl always somewhere about. So good-morning." And at last he moved off.

"I do think there must be more intolerable people here than in most places!" exclaimed

Emily. "Quick, Gwen! or the Animated No will have us again; she is lingering near."

They reached the Deanery in safety, and found Mrs. Eustace waiting in the hall.

"I fancied you were coming here," she said. "It is so very kind of you. You do not know what a kindness you would do me, if you could but make friends with my poor Rosa. When Mary leaves us she will be so lonely; and, you see, we feel there is more chance that she may make friends with you than with people she has known all her life, because she has always kept them at a distance, and now they hardly ever come to see her. Will you try?" she added, looking pleadingly from one to the other.

"Indeed we will! it will be a pleasure to us, because we know nobody here, and so it will be delightful to be wanted; won't it, Gwen?"

But Gwenevere did not respond. She felt a great horror of seeing this poor girl of whom they had heard so much. However, she followed in silence, and Mrs. Eustace led them to a large, old-fashioned room, long and low, with two windows opening on a pretty garden, and a third, beyond which lay a small conservatory. The walls were almost concealed by books, and one or two good pictures. At one end of the room, sat the white haired Dean, writing busily: at the other, a girl

of about thirteen was hard at work at her lessons. Close to the fire was a low couch, and from a chair beside it, Mary Eustace rose, and came to meet the two girls. The room was, Emily thought, the pleasantest and most home-like she had seen since she left Silverton ; but there was one thing there that was very sad—the face of the invalid girl who was lying on the couch. It was a pretty face—more than pretty : with sad blue eyes, and fair hair tied back with a blue ribbon, but curling close round a fine, well-developed brow. But there was a look of hopeless discontent, a kind of determination not to be pleased, which quite spoiled an otherwise attractive face. She was covered with a soft cider-down *duvet*, and wrapped in a thick knitted shawl, so that her deformity was quite concealed, to Gwenevere's great relief. The visitors were made welcome by the rest of the family, the Dean leaving his writing, and little Sophy her lessons. Emily sat down by Rosa, and tried to get her to talk. She tried subject after subject, getting only short and somewhat ungracious answers. A piece of embroidery lay upon the sofa.

“ Is this your work ? How very pretty ! Did you design it yourself ? ”

“ No ; Mary did.”

“ Mary always designs Rosa's work,” said little Sophy, who had drawn near. “ I wish I could do

it ; for when Mary is gone away, Rosa will miss her pretty designs."

Rosa's face changed—a cloud seemed to gather upon it.

"Go away, Sophy ; you speak too loud," she said peevishly.

"I can design, though not so well as that," said Emily. "But my dear Mammie—Mrs. Darnell, I mean—is very clever about it. So you need not want for designs ; we can contrive some among us, surely."

"Thank you, but I do not care about the work in the least," was the unpromising reply.

"Do you not work much ?"

"No."

"I dare say you read a good deal ; you have plenty of books here. I am trying to see what kind of books they are, but I am too short-sighted."

"They are very stupid books," remarked Rosa. Emily took out her double eye-glasses, and perched them upon her nose : I do not know why, but in her glasses she always looked about ten years old.

"History !" said she ; "I like history so much. Oh, you have Prescott's 'Peru'—I am longing to read that."

"It is very dull," said Rosa.

• The Dean, who was listening, thought that his poor little visitor had been sufficiently snubbed by

his perverse daughter, so he came to the rescue. Opening the book-case, he said—

"I shall be very happy to lend it to you, Miss Fane; and you must not mind my foolish Rosa: she read it with great interest, and so will you. I will send it to Moorside in the evening."

"Thank you; I am so glad to get it. I am very fond of reading, and we have plenty of time, but my Aunt seems to have no books except old sermons and a box of novels from Mudie's."

"Which you have devoured," said the Dean, smiling.

"No; because I have not much time in the evening, and we never were allowed to read novels in the morning. I began one, but I have only read a chapter or two." And she named the book. The Dean looked down at her thoughtfully, and said—

"Now I wonder what you would say if I gave you advice the very first time we have met?"

"I should say, 'Thank you, Mr. Dean,'" replied Emily, who had risen to take Prescott: and as she spoke she made him a saucy little curtsy.

"Then I may?" he said laughingly.

"I shall be really grateful. Is it about the book? it seems to me a queer book."

"It is no book for you, my dear child: do not read it. You are young and innocent; do not read what may sully your fresh young mind."

"But," said Emily, looking round to see where the others were—they had gone into the little conservatory—"I asked Aunt Gundred for a book, and she said I could have any that were in the box. And I told her which I was taking!"

"Yet I cannot take back my words. No daughter of mine should read that book."

"Of course I shall not read it; but what am I to do? I *do* love a novel, and there will always be a box full, and how am I to know which to read? I'll tell you what, Mr. Dean,—if you will allow me, I can always tell you all the books that come, and you can tell me if there are any bad ones among them."

"It must be a private understanding between us," said the Dean. "But I shall gladly tell you."

"You are so kind," she said, drawing a little nearer to him, "that I should like to ask you something more, if I may?"

"What is it?"

"You know all about Gwennie and me, don't you?—well, we have always visited the poor people at Silverton—and how often we have wished that we had something to give them! and now that we have plenty, we have no poor people to visit. And—do you know any, Sir?"

"A few," he answered, laughing again. "But

it is all in the town that my work lies, and your Aunt would not approve of that, for you and your Cousin."

"In the town?—oh, how *very* nice," Emily said quickly. "I want of all things to learn to work in a town parish, because——"

She stopped, blushing crimson; and the Dean laughed.

"We were on the verge of a tremendous revelation then!" said he. "You stopped only just in time. Oh, Miss Fane, you are a very imprudent young woman!"

"My tongue runs away with me," she said, getting redder and redder; "but, all the same, I *have* a reason, and a good reason: and will you not teach me?" •

"I do not think Lady Le Mesurier will give you leave to visit in Fairminster," he replied.

"But has she any right to prevent me, if it is a right thing to do? If I thought I ought to do it, I should not mind her."

"I do not think you can decide whether you ought to undertake work here, or not, just at present. You may find your time fully occupied. Suppose we postpone this question for a time? and when you have been here some time, if you still wish this, and find that you can manage it, we will find you plenty to do—and be glad of your help."

"You are very, very kind," said Emily.

"Well, I hope I should always be kind; but in your case I have a reason for thinking that you may sometimes want a little good advice (and mine is sure to be good, isn't it, Rosa?) and that you would welcome it. Paul Darnell and I were friends at college, and he wrote to me about you and your Cousin."

"I am very glad; and so will Gwen be."

But Emily's manner was less frank and easy, for if the truth must be told, she had forgotten poor Rosa altogether, and being now reminded of her presence, she did not feel as well inclined to confide in her as in the kind-looking, white-haired Dean. But Rosa's face had quite lost its ungracious expression, and she now looked up, and said—

"I think you had forgotten that I was here—and I could not go away, you know. But Papa will answer for me that I never repeat."

"Rosie hears everything, and says nothing," replied the Dean; "and besides, you know, you stopped just in time. Do you sing, Miss Fane?"

"Yes; but not so well as Gwenever."

"But as Miss Atheling is at this moment out in the garden with my wife and Mary, perhaps you will sing for Rosa? She loves music, and we, alas, have not a voice in the family."

Emily went to the piano at once, and sang,—first a pretty little French song, then an English ballad. When she had finished, Rosa said—

“Do you sing sacred music? I think your voice is wasted upon a ballad.”

“Rosie, Rosie!” said the Dean.

“I did not mean to be rude, Miss Fane. Only you sing with so much expression.”

Emily sang, “He shall feed His flock like a Shepherd,” singing both the Contralto and the Soprano solo, which was not too high for her. Then she looked round. Rosa was sitting up, and the shawl had fallen from her shoulders: her sad and hopeless deformity was but too visible, but the girl’s face was lovely! Her eyes were raised, her cheeks glowed: the poor pale creature was perfectly transformed for the moment.

“No more,” she said; “don’t sing anything else.”

“I don’t think I need thank you,” said the Dean, softly.

Just then the rest of the party entered rather hastily from the conservatory. Gwenevere glanced at Rosa, turned pale, and stood like a statue. Emily contrived to get between her and the sofa, and Mary Eustace came up and drew the shawl round her sister, saying—

“You’ll catch cold, dear. How pleased you look! I know you’ve been having some music.”

"Emily," said Gwenevere, trying to recover herself, "do you know that it is twenty minutes to two?"

"Oh, Gwen, we shall be in disgrace! Let us run off at once; but may we come again, some day?"

"Indeed, I hope you will. Suppose I send for a cab for you, and then perhaps you may be in good time after all," said Mrs. Eustace, ringing the bell.

"May I come again to sing for you?" whispered Emily, bending over the sofa. Rosa looked up in her face, and smiled.

"You don't mean to punish me, then, for being so cross at first? I am so afraid of strangers; but I shall not be afraid of you any more—I don't feel as if you were a stranger now. Do come, whenever you can."

"May I even try to make a design for you?" asked Emily, teasingly.

"Yes," replied Rosa, laughing (and Emily saw that her father and mother paused in their conversation to listen to her laugh, and glance at each other); "and Prescott is a most interesting book, and I read and work as much as I can. Now, are you satisfied?"

"Not quite—may I kiss you? Now I *am* satisfied, so good-bye. We will come again, and then

Gwennie shall sing for you. She sings very much better than I do."

The cab had arrived, and they were whisked through the streets, and as far as the gate of Moorside. There they alighted, and walked up just as the bell rang. So they did not get into disgrace that time.

"Emily," said Gwenevere, while they were putting off their hats and jackets, "do not ask me to sing at the Deanery."

"Oh, Gwen! and that poor thing does love music so dearly."

"I should like to please her, but there would be no use in my attempting it. I should break down, and begin to cry. Oh, Emily, it is dreadful to see her!"

"It must be dreadful to have to bear it," said Emily, looking rather distressed. "I wish you could sing for her, Gwen."

But Gwen only shook her head. "You have more nerve than I have," she replied. "I felt quite ill."

They ran down to luncheon—just in time.

"Well, did you pay your visit at the Deanery?" inquired Lady Le Mesurier.

"We did, and they were very kind and pleasant. We were very near being late, Aunt Gundred!"

"Did you meet any one you knew?"

"Mrs. Appleby," said Emily.

"And Sir Clarence Le Mesurier," added Gwenevere.

"Yes, so we did. I forgot him," said Emily, carelessly.

"You were very cruel to me, my good Cousins," remarked Colonel Atheling. "I was looking forward to a delightful walk—you have no idea how pretty the moor is,—and you went off and left me to my own devices without a word."

"We went to Church," answered Gwenevere.

"I am not a heathen—I could have gone to Church too. The Cathedral, I suppose; for I know the music there is a treat. I consider myself badly used."

"So you were, Cousin Harold," said Emily; "but we won't do it again. And if you care for a walk after luncheon, Gwen and I are not a bit tired."

"But I have some visits to pay, and you might consider me as well as Harold," said Lady Le Mesurier.

"Well, but do you really dislike going alone?"

"No, for I am used to it. But I am going to Castle Dering—the Derings came home yesterday, and I should like to take you, Emily. Old Lady Marlinton was your poor mother's godmother, and she will want to see you."

"Then I had better go with you, if you don't mind, Gwenevere?"

Gwenevere being unable to decide which was the more awful, a drive alone with Aunt Gundred, or a walk alone with Colonel Atheling, made no reply; so the matter was considered settled.

"Emily, I want you to look your very best," said Lady Le Mesurier, as soon as luncheon was over; "so, to oblige me, put on the dark blue merino with the black embroidery,—it is very becoming to you; wear the jacket to match, and the black hat with blue feathers."

Emily got up, laughing.

"Well, I like this dress, with my beloved seal-skin better by far! But I will change to please you, Aunt Gundred. Only as Patty is not the quickest person in the world, you must let me run off at once, or I shall keep you waiting." And she left the room.

"The seal-skin cap is most becoming," said Colonel Atheling. Lady Le Mesurier did not seem to hear him; she turned to Gwenevere presently, and said—

"Gwenevere, my dear, I have a proposal to make to you. You want a maid who thoroughly understands her business, particularly hair-dressing. Now, really Hortense is quite an artist in that line, and her talents are thrown away upon me, because

I never make any change in my style. Hortense is wild to undertake the care of your appearance, and it happens that her sister, who was my maid once, is out of place just now, and would be delighted to come to me ; her health has given way, and here, with me, she would have very little to do. Will you take Hortense for a time ? You will really oblige me."

"Indeed, I shall be very glad. You are sure you are not putting yourself out of your way to oblige me ?" said Gwenevere. Colonel Atheling smiled slightly—no one had ever yet found my Lady out in such an act as that.

Gwenevere ran to her Cousin's room to tell her bit of news.

"Emily, fancy my good fortune ! I am to have Hortense for my maid for a time. Patty, she will teach you everything you want to learn."

Emily looked vexed.

"Is it quite settled ?" said she.

"Yes, I think so. Why do you ask ?"

"I will tell you some other time," Emily answered.

"And I'm sure, Miss Atheling, I never complained of having to do for both of you ; and I could manage very well," remarked Patty, rather grievously.

"You have been very obliging, Patty," an-

though he did not contribute much to the conversation, being by no means a talker, yet he seemed to enjoy himself highly. He left off staring, after Emily had given him one or two tremendous snubs; it seemed to dawn upon him quite suddenly that they really disliked it. Almost every day the girls went to the Cathedral, and frequently Emily went to the Deanery afterwards, Gwenevere excusing herself, and walking with Harold, or doing some commissions for Lady Le Mesurier in the mean time. Emily was very sorry that Gwennie did not care for the Eustaces as she did, for she had an instinctive feeling that their friendship was a safeguard; but she knew by old experience that Gwenevere would not get over her nervous shrinking from the sight of Rosa. Occasionally Colonel Atheling asked them to go for a long country walk before luncheon, and they enjoyed these greatly. He declared he was relieved to find that they had not made a vow to go to Church every day.

But as time went on, Emily began to be aware of a certain subtle antagonism between herself and her pleasant Cousin; and she became aware, too, though she would not acknowledge it to herself, that Gwenevere was less open in her chatter when they sat together by the fire, alone. Looking back upon this time with the light of after events to

guide her, she dated this change from the night on which they had a long conversation, during which Gwenevere repeated to her what Harold had said about his friend and the engaged young lady.

"And what did you answer? Oh, Gwen, I hope you told him about Hugh!"

"My dear Emily, how could I? Suppose I had said, 'Do you know that I am engaged?' don't you see what it would have seemed to imply?"

"You need not have put it in that way; and I do wish you had told him. Not that he does not know, for his telling you that story proves that he does; but now he can always say, 'Why did you not tell me?'"

"Emily, you wrong him very much. He is not that sort of person at all. He talks very freely to me—more so, I think, than to you; and he is quite incapable of double-dealing. Besides, it does not matter to him. He has no thought of that kind about me."

"Now, Gwen, listen to me. I think it would be wrong of me not to tell you what I cannot help suspecting. I may be wrong, but it can do no harm for you to be careful. I do think Harold admires you, and that Aunt Gundred wishes you to like him, and to give Hugh up. And you will have to take care, for I am certain that neither he nor she will hesitate to influence you, or to manage

you, by *any* means. I do feel that there is a want of candour and straightforwardness about them, and it makes me afraid that you may find yourself in some uncomfortable position, just because you are so unsuspicious. Do just tell Harold plainly, the first time you can find an opportunity, that you are engaged. Or, let me do it, if you don't like to say it yourself."

"Emiiy, it is not like you to be so suspicious. I wish you would not put such ideas into my head. Besides, it is nonsense: first you say he knows it already, and then that I ought to tell him. I could not do it; it would be too dreadful! Suppose he asked me why I told him?"

"You could say, 'We are cousins and friends, and I thought it would interest you.' Let me tell him, then,"—as Gwenevere shook her head.

"No, no; I cannot allow it. And you have not said that you are engaged, although a clergyman sounds so much better than a subaltern in a line regiment—mud-crushers, as Harold calls them."

"He said that to you, and yet you don't see? No, you do not see it, because you are too innocent and open to imagine that people can be anything else in their dealings with you. I *will* believe that; for I will not think that you are secretly a little ashamed of Hugh—poor Hugh, who has loved you so long, and for yourself, too,—not for your money."

"You ought to be ashamed of having such a thought in your mind," cried Gwenevere, getting into a passion for nearly the first time in her life. "I don't know you to-night, Emily. You suspect every one, and insult me."

Quick-tempered by nature, and not used to words like these from Gwenevere, Emily sprang to her feet, exclaiming—

"If that is the light in which you regard my wish to put you on your guard, why, go your own way for the future. I am going to bed."

"Very well. I certainly shall not take *your* way, and I beg that you will not interfere. I may not be as quick as you are, Emily, but I believe I know what is womanly and ladylike quite as well, if not better."

"That is no speech of your own," said Emily, now in a towering rage. "I suppose that is one of Colonel Atheling's delicate compliments—so kind of him to pay it at my expense! So kind of you, too, to listen to it! You are improving very much, Gwenevere! I begin to think you will soon be quite too good for Hugh Vincent!"

With this parting shaft, the fiery morsel vanished into her own room, where she tumbled herself promiscuously into a chair, and began to cry. Before they slept the Cousins were friends again, Emily having apologized abjectly, and Gwenevere

having graciously forgiven her. But, somehow, there was a slight restraint after that. Emily struggled against it, but felt that it was there.

On the whole, Emily was not particularly happy, though she enjoyed a good deal of what was going on. For nearly the first time in her life, she did not quite know what she ought to do, and she had no friend to consult. She felt as if her suspicions were wicked, and could not breathe them to any one, or even write them to dear Mammie. So, in spite of the bright, easy life around her, she had been much happier at Silverton. It seemed to her that years had passed since she left her old home, before she had been months in the new one. She would have been even more uneasy, had she heard what passed between Colonel Atheling and his Aunt one evening, when he had just returned from a visit to his own home. He went to the door of Lady Le Mesurier's sitting-room, and asked if he might come in, as he wanted a quiet talk with her.

"Certainly, Harold. There is a chair; make yourself comfortable in that warm ^{"nook"} corner. What is it? anything about Gwenevere?"

"It is principally about Gwenevere. To begin with, though,—have you made arrangements about the Winthrop child, for she will be in England by the next mail?"

"Oh, yes, all is arranged. The child is to go to

Mrs. Darnell. The two girls are to pay her expenses (a hundred and fifty) between them. You have no objection, have you, to Gwenevere undertaking this?"

"So far, you know, I have no right to object; but, in any case, I approve. It is a kind feeling, and the two girls can well afford it. We must send to Southampton to meet the child, and take her to Silverton. I will pay the expenses of her journey."

"Very good. I can send Hingston—my house-keeper, you know—to meet her, and she shall get her a good outfit for her first winter in England: so she may be said to be disposed of. What more have you to say to me?"

"It is about Gwenevere. I have been feeling my way cautiously, and I have now quite made up my mind. I am certain that she was led into this engagement, or liking—whatever we are to call it—by those about her: and I think she is ashamed of it now. I am pretty sure I shall succeed with her, but I should like to separate her from Emily before I venture any further. Emily has considerable influence over her, and I perceive will use it against me. Her manner to me has quite changed of late. I feel that she is inimical."

"You are quite right there. I know for certain that Emily has seen through our plans for Gwenevere, and will thwart them if she can."

"You *know* this?"

"Yes, I have, in this instance, done what I never did before; but I felt that I was bound to use every means. I placed my own maid, Hortense, about the girls, and so I have means of knowing what is going on."

"I am not disposed to be defeated by Emily," said the tall Colonel, standing up before the fire and looking like one who would not take defeat kindly from any one. "Gwenevere suits me perfectly, and in every way it is a reasonable marriage. But I should like to be without Emily for a time—for Gwenevere must be allowed to change her mind without knowing it, and Emily will never allow her to do that."

"Very good, Harold. I will arrange it all."

"May I ask how?"

"No, no, don't ask me. I never knew a man yet who could act unconsciously well enough to deceive a clever girl like Emily. Let it come as a surprise on you as on them. I can manage it perfectly."

"All right, my dear Princess Talleyrand! nature meant you for a diplomatist. I leave it in your hands."

Two or three days having passed, Harold was wondering if his Aunt had forgotten all about it, when one morning, at breakfast, she said—

"This letter concerns you, Emily. Lady Mar-

lington writes to ask you to go to Castle Dering, to be one of Lady Constance's bridesmaids. It seems the two girls have taken a fancy to you, and the Cousin who was to have paired with Frances, is ill, and cannot possibly come,—so Lady Constance hopes that you will consent to fill the gap, to oblige her."

"Oh, how delightful! I never saw a wedding, except the poor people at Silverton. But don't they ask Gwen?"

"No; only you. They only want one bridesmaid, and of course the house will be very full. You must go into Fairminster this morning, and buy what you want; or shall I send Fanchette? Your dress is to be white corded silk, with ruby velvet trimmings: see, here is a sketch of the dress. Your maid, Hortense, and Fanchette must all set to work upon it at once, for you are to go to-morrow."

"They never can have it made!"

"You don't know what two French women can do if they are put upon their mettle. You will go, then, Emily?"

"I shall like it very much. Ought I to write?"

"Just a line to Lady Constance, and I will enclose it. I shall order the carriage at once, so you can truly say you are hurried. Take Hortense with you, if Gwenevere can spare her, and let her study this sketch and description on the way, and

she will tell you how much to get. What! are you going, too, Gwenevere?" she added, while carefully separating the sketch of the dress from the rest of old Lady Marlinton's letter.

"Yes!" said Gwenevere. "Emily would not know how to choose a dress without me!"

"Indeed, I should not. I only hope we may be able to buy one dress, and not two. Though it would be very becoming to you, Gwennie,—look, it is just like an old picture."

"Please resist the temptation, you silly pair of big babies; for it would not do for Gwenevere to appear in the bridesmaid's dress. What! you going, too, Harold? am I to be quite deserted?"

"Now, my Lady, don't I know that you will disappear as soon as we leave the breakfast-room, and be seen no more until luncheon, when we shall all reappear? We will send Hortense home—shall we, Emily?—and take a walk ourselves?"

In less than half an hour they were on their way to Fairminster. The silk and velvet were bought, and Hortense sent home all alone in the carriage. The others went to the Cathedral, and were there joined by Sir Clarence, who opened a prayer-book, and then had a bad relapse into his staring habits—for he gazed steadfastly at Emily during the entire service. At first Emily, who was by no means thinking of him, was not aware that he *was*

staring ; but after a while it made her uncomfortable, and she made up her mind that he had forgotten her last snub, and wanted another. So when they left the Cathedral, with Sir Clarence still in attendance, Emily said to her Cousin—

"Where are we going now?"

"There is a curious bit of the old city wall not far from this ; I thought you and Gwenevere would like to see it. It is supposed to be Roman."

"Just a bit of dilapidated brick-work," said Sir Clarence, "not worth seeing. But the walk is pretty, so come along."

"Harold, will it be out of your way to come back this way for me? I want to see Rosa Eustace and tell her where I am going."

"Of course we can come back ; in fact, it is on our way, but——"

"Then do call for me, please. I hope you'll show me the wall some other day."

She walked briskly off to the Deanery, Sir Clarence gazing after her blankly.

"Well, Le Mesurier, will you come with us?"

"No," said Sir Clarence, with a lazy half-smile. 'Old adage—'Two is company,' etc. I shall say good-bye for the present."

He lifted his hat to Gwenevere, and walked away.



CHAPTER IX.

TWO LETTERS.

LADY LE MESURIER was, as usual, in her own sitting-room, giving audience to her servants, writing her letters, and last, not least, weaving her plans, when a servant brought her a card. It bore the name of Sir Clarence Le Mesurier, and these words in pencilling in his big, schoolboy hand, "Know you hate me at this hour, but want to see you." So my Lady sailed down to the drawing-room.

"Well, Clarence, how goes the world with you?"

"Wags away," replied Sir Clarence, laconically.

"Fine day; at least, I think so."

"Why, I think you *may* commit yourself to that statement, most cautious of men. It is glorious weather."

"Aw, yes. *Thought* it was a fine day," said the young baronet, examining the heel of his boot with interest.

"Anything wrong with your boot, Clarence?"

"Pinches," remarked Clarence, with one of his slow half-smiles, which always seemed going to be good smiles, only they died away so early.

"I suppose the question is, where does it pinch? Is that the question that has brought you here so early?"

"No. I know where it pinches well enough."

"But, you did want to speak to me, I suppose?"

"You're in a hurry, perhaps? What a bore for you: What on earth have you to do? I'm never in a hurry."

Lady Le Mesurier laughed. "I don't suppose you ever are!" she said; "but then you see, Clarence, I really have a good deal to do."

"Bid one of the servants do it, then. Or, better still, leave it undone. That's my plan," he added, with an air of modest merit.

"You ridiculous fellow! *Have* you anything to say to me, Clarence?"

"Aunt Gundred, Emily Fane is very saucy."

"Very likely; but for all that, I advise you to call her Miss Fane."

"Aw, yes, indeed. Awful rap over the knuckles I should get if she heard that."

A dead silence. Sir Clarence finished the inspection of his boot, and seemed to become unduly anxious about the contents of his pockets, of which he surely had an unusual number. One by one

he gravely emptied them, producing much small change, many toothpicks, several cigars, and four pencil-cases ; also a few buttons and an assortment of pins. He turned these choice articles over, and replaced them. Then he said again—

“Very saucy, she is.”

“I am sorry,” began Lady Le Mesurier.

“Don’t trouble,” said he. “I like it.” And he fell into another meditation, this time concerning the buttons of his coat. He buttoned them all, then unbuttoned them, finally leaving it as before.

“I like her,” he began again, suddenly roused, perhaps by hearing the clock strike the half-hour ; for his Aunt lay back in her chair and looked placidly out of the window, determined to leave him to himself.

“I like Miss Fane, Aunt Gundred. I feel as if I were going to fall in love.”

“Indeed !”

“Don’t wonder you’re surprised. I never felt it before.”

“Oh, Clarence !”

“You think I’m mistaken ? Not a bit of it. I have let girls angle, you know ; it is pleasant. But I say to myself, ‘Suppose my elder brother had lived, and I was a sub in the Line,’ and that generally settles it. All except a Miss Fairford, and she went away. And she is not to be compared

to Miss Fane; besides, Miss Fane snubs me so awfully!"

"A curious reason for your preference, is it not?"

"Not at all," he said, sitting upright and speaking quite quickly. "I never was snubbed before. The girl, on her promotion, who snubs an unmarried baronet with a fine place and plenty of money, *must* be a good girl. If she came to like me, it would be *me*, and not *mine*. So I want to know, before I go any further, is she engaged?"

"No, she is not."

"All right. Some way or other I had got it into my head she was, just from her manner. I suppose she does not like me, but I shall try to make her. I am going to Castle Dering for this wedding; did you know that?"

"Are you? Why, only this morning Emily was invited to be one of the bridesmaids."

"Yes, so they told me. I met them in the big—in the Cathedral."

"They will soon be home now. Clarence, do not stare at Emily as you sometimes do. She really dislikes it, and it is not 'good form,' as you would say yourself."

"I don't *go* to do it, but her little face keeps changing so that it makes me stare. It must be very tiring—must it not?—to the muscles, you know."

"Clarence, I sometimes wonder if you really are a fool, or only pretending."

"Do you know, I sometimes wonder myself?" he answered thoughtfully. "Kind of inspired idiot, I fancy."

"I do not see the inspiration?"

"You never will. It's invisible, isn't it?—a kind of all-over-ishness."

"Just so," answered Lady Le Mesurier, laughing. "Is not that one of the girls passing the window?" said she, looking out again. "Yes; and there is Harold with the other. Luncheon will soon be ready; you will stay, I suppose?"

Emily departed in solitary state next day, attended by Patty. When she was saying good-bye to Gwenevere, a sudden chill seemed to come over her. She put her arms round Gwennie's waist, and laid her head lovingly against her.

"Oh, Gwennie dear, don't be vexed if I say be very careful while I am away. Write very often to me, and to Hugh. Won't you?"

Gwenevere reddened a little, but before she had an answer ready, Lady Le Mesurier came into the room with a little box in her hand.

"Emily, you have so few ornaments, and none suited to that dress. I want you to wear these pearls, my dear; both at the wedding and at the dance in the evening. Gwenevere and I are asked for the evening, by the way."

Emily was woman enough to forget her vague uneasiness in admiring the pearls, and Lady Le Mesurier, warned by Gwenevere's distressed look, did not leave them alone again.

The very next day a letter from Mr. Atheling, of Saxelby, informed his son that he was feeling somewhat better than usual, and greatly wished to see his sister and Miss Atheling.

"If you can persuade Gundred to come and to bring the young lady, it would really be a pleasure to me. Tell Gwenevere not to deny an old man's wish. You and she are nearly the last of a long line. Make Gundred bring her."

Colonel Atheling read this letter aloud, looking a little puzzled.

"So like my brother Egbert," said Lady Le Mesurier, laughing. "He has forgotten Emily's very existence. Poor Egbert! I should like to see him again, but what am I to do with Emily?"

"To-morrow is to be the wedding-day, and the ball in the evening. You must stay for that. Then Emily was to remain with them for a fortnight, was it not? If you come to Saxelby the day after the ball, I can explain to my father, and come back for Emily, if you like."

Lady Le Mesurier gave him a half-amused look—a look on which she would not have ventured had Emily been present. He understood, and was silent.

"Lady Marlinton will keep Emily for me, I dare say," she answered, quietly. "It would not be worth while for her to make the journey just for a couple of days. Yes—and it is only Gwenevere whom Egbert wants to see. We will go, then. I shall write to Egbert about it."

They both looked at Gwenevere. She sat with her eyes cast down on a letter which lay before her. Her fair, soft features were at rest. Did she see, or did she not see, what this invitation implied?

"Gwenevere, will you come?" Harold said at last. She looked up.

"Is it not settled? I thought Aunt Gundred said we were to go."

"But not if you object. My father and I long to see you at Saxelby, but not if you don't wish it yourself. Will you come, Gwenevere?"

"I think it will be very pleasant," she answered, quietly.

Harold frowned, and left the room. He was not sure that she understood him. Lady Le Mesurier looked at her thoughtfully.

"Gwenevere," said she, "you will make my brother—to say nothing of any one else—very happy by going to Saxelby."

"Of course I will go, if you like. It is very kind of him to ask me."

"Gwenevere! are you as innocent as you choose to seem, my dear?"

"Innocent!" the girl said, drawing herself up proudly, but blushing crimson at the same time. "I do not know what you mean, Aunt Gundred."

The elder lady laughed. "I think you do; I am sure you understand, my dear."

Gwenevere left the room without replying; and her Aunt saw that she had left her letter—a letter from Hugh Vincent—on the table.

"Signs of the times," said she, laughing. And she took the letter and gave it to Hortense for her mistress.

Gwenevere had run upstairs to her little sitting-room. She sat down, and took up a book which lay on the table—a little book of "Daily Meditations," which she had used for years. Without giving herself time for thought, she found her place, and began to read, but soon found that the words had no meaning to her. She began again, and yet again, with the same result. At last she began to read aloud, which quickly brought a housemaid in from one of the bed-rooms to ask if she had called.

"No, certainly not," Gwenevere answered, almost angrily. She finished the portion for the day in her little book, and then looked out of the window. It was raining a little: no day to insist upon the unwilling Hortense accompanying her to Fairminster.

“Yet I would give worlds to go to the Cathedral,” said she aloud. “How *am* I to get through this morning all alone?”

Hortense came in with her letter at that moment.

“You left this on the breakfast table, Miss Atheling,” said she.

Hugh’s letter—and she had forgotten it! She grew crimson with vexation and shame.

“Something has agitated you, Miss Atheling,” said the Frenchwoman, in a low voice. “Can I do anything for you?”

“I did not ask—I do not want anything. Leave the room, if you please.”

Hortense glided away

“Oh, what *is* the matter with me? I, who never used to feel angry—everything angers me now. What is wrong with me? what can it be?”

She sat down and opened her letter. It contained nothing to restore her complacency. Hugh complained gently that her last letters had been short and cold, and that she had not written now for many days. “I feel it the more,” Hugh said, “because at first you wrote so often. I do not wish to be unreasonable, but now I begin really to feel that we are separated.”

“But he is unreasonable,” said Gwenevere, in a worried tone of voice. “How can I write volumes

every day, when I never have a moment to myself? I will write to him now, however."

She sat down before the writing-table.

"My dear Hugh——"

For nearly half an hour she sat there, looking at those three words. Then she wrote—

"I am sorry you have missed my letters, but I really have had no time to myself lately. Emily is away, you know." Then followed a long account of Emily's invitation, etc. Then—

"Aunt Gundred is going to take me with her to her brother's place in Kent, while Emily is at Castle Dering. He is a great invalid, and has taken a fancy to see me. Aunt Gundred says I know why, but I do not know. How can I know, when I never saw him in my life? You are unreasonable, too, Hugh. You forget how strange everything is to me. I am so puzzled sometimes. I wish I had never become rich, nor had to leave Silverton. I was far happier there, and should never have wished for a change. Now everything is always changing; I hardly know myself. How can I tell you everything, when I do not understand what is going on round me? I feel as if I were dreaming, and could not awake. Emily understands things better than I do, but she is away."

"There—that must do. I *don't* understand; it is quite true that I don't understand. Yet he will

think this cold. I must say something more. What can I say?"

She got up and walked about aimlessly, but paused by the fire. Her eye fell upon the two photographs of the Vincent girls. She looked at them for a long time, her face expressing anything rather than affection. •

"I *cannot* bear this!" she exclaimed passionately; and seizing the luckless pictures, she dropped them both into a red cave in the glowing fire. They shrivelled up and were gone in a moment. Gwenevere burst into a storm of tears.

"What have I done? Oh, what does it mean? I cannot bear this—it will kill me. Oh, that I were safe back at Silverton! there I should awake, and be myself again. Shall I go? I could do it. I could go into Fairminster to-morrow; he would go with me, though. I could go to the Deanery; he won't go there. He will offer to call for me, but I can leave soon and go to the station; there is a train at one o'clock. I should reach home before night. I should be safe. He would never follow me. He would know that I am faithful—to Hugh."

But was she faithful to Hugh in her heart? Her plan was a good one; if she carried it out she knew that she would be safe. Harold might despise her, but he would never follow her. Lady Le Mesurier might be very angry, but would

probably leave her to shape her own course for the future. It was surely her good Angel who whispered that plan to her—a plan which many would condemn, but which she knew was her only safety. But though she knew this, she hesitated. Was it want of courage or want of will? Twice she took up the pen to add a line, asking Hugh to meet her next day at Buxton; twice she laid it down.

"If I tell Hugh I am going, I *must* go; and I am afraid. I shall never have courage to do it."

She hesitated until the bell rang, and then thrust her letter into an envelope, not even remembering to finish it. "I can go home to-morrow if I choose, all the same," she said. She never called Silverton "home" again.

The ball that night at Castle Dering was a very gay one; and one of the gayest there was Gwenevere Atheling. Her usually quiet manner seemed quite forgotten: she laughed and danced and talked—ay, and flirted! in a manner which surprised both her Aunt and Emily, and, indeed, surprised the girl herself, too. Harold was not there; knowing the dilapidated condition of Saxelby, he had hurried home to make such arrangements as were possible for the comfort of his guests. The next morning was fair and pleasant, but Gwenevere was not up in time to go to Fairminster as she had planned. And she

left Moorside that evening—not for Buxton and Silverton, but for London and Saxelby.

When Hugh Vincent received that letter after several days without a line (and you must remember that at first Gwenevere had written nearly every day), he was thoroughly alarmed. Not that he doubted her—how could he doubt one so loving, so gentle, so devoted to him as Gwenevere had been?—but he feared for her. He thought that this incoherent letter showed that she was ill, and by her complaint about feeling puzzled and unhappy, he understood that she was not kindly treated. After making himself profoundly miserable by these reflections, he walked over to the Parsonage, to try if he could get any comfort from Mrs. Darnell. He found her and her husband in the little study.

“You are welcome, Hugh! You do not desert us, though we no longer have our two children to tempt you to visit us. Sit down; Paul will finish that sentence in a minute or so. Have you heard our good news?”

“No; what is it? You have heard from them, then? Is Gwenevere ill, Mrs. Darnell? I have been frightened about her.”

“My letter was from Emily, but of course she would have said if Gwenevere was ill. She mentions her, too; so I am sure she was well when Emily

left her. You know Emily is at Castle Dering, and is to be bridesmaid to Lady Constance: great promotion for our little firefly, Hugh?"

"Read this letter, Mrs. Darnell; I don't think Gwenevere will object to my showing it to you; and I cannot make you understand what alarms me unless you read it."

Mr. Darnell apparently thought that if his wife might read the letter, he might do so, too; for, laying down his pen, he came and stood behind her chair. When he had finished the letter he went back to his writing without speaking.

"No signature!" exclaimed Mrs. Darnell, "Gwenevere must have been in some distress when she wrote this, but not ill, or she would have said so. Perhaps she did not like going to pay this visit without Emily,—you know how shy Gwenevere is, and how she likes to let Emily talk for both. I am sure it was only that, Hugh. Depend upon it, Lady Le Mesurier is whisking her off against her will: the poor child made an effort to write as usual, but she is so simple-minded that she could not do it. She will write you a more comfortable letter when she is over her first shyness at Saxelby."

"Has she been writing constantly?" asked Mr. Darnell, looking up.

"N—not very—for the last few weeks. But,"



HE CAME AND STOOD BEHIND HER CHAIR.

added Hugh quickly, "I am sure Mrs. Darnell is right; you have quite set my mind at ease. Gwenevere is very shrinking and nervous, poor child. Now tell me what good news you have heard?"

"You'll say that is not of much consequence to you, but it is of great consequence to us. The little girl, Ethel Winthorp, is coming by the next mail. Emily wrote to say that Lady Le Mesurier's housekeeper is to meet the child at Southampton and bring her here, so that we shall have neither trouble nor expense about it. Those dear girls! they are so pleased with their plan for our benefit; and indeed, it is a very welcome help to us: we were just going to advertise when Emily wrote about it."

Hugh stayed at the Parsonage for some time, and departed, professing himself much cheered. He did not remark that Mr. Darnell avoided giving any opinion concerning Gwenevere's letter; but Mrs. Darnell remarked it, and when they were alone together, she said—

"Paul, you were not satisfied with that letter?"

"Anne, don't talk to me about it; or, if you do, prepare your mind for a shock. I can hold my tongue if you like, but if I speak, you won't like what I shall say."

"You may as well say it; but Hugh agreed with me."

"Yes, just while you were talking to him, and he will continue to do so as long as he can. But the poor fellow's first instinct was the truer guide. He is alarmed—and I am glad of it."

"You think the change will spoil my two darlings, I see."

"Not a bit of it, my dear. They are not mere children, that circumstances should have such irresistible power over them. The change is simply bringing out into action what, without that change, might have remained hidden both from us and themselves."

"Paul, you speak as if you had a bad opinion of the children!"

"Not so, my dear wife; don't be hurt for your nurslings. It would ill become me, knowing something of my own heart, to condemn severely the weakness of another,—and I was not speaking of Emily at all. You think Gwenevere very superior in many respects to Emily; and so did I, once."

"But not now?"

"Not since I prepared them both for Confirmation. It was then that I became aware that Gwenevere's piety, beautiful as it was, was a habit of thinking and feeling, copied from you, my dear,—unconsciously, no doubt. Her religious observances were far more numerous than Emily's, and she enjoyed them more than Emily did."

But whereas Gwenevere did exactly what you advised, Emily told me honestly that she only did what she found 'did her good,' to use her own words. There was a solid reality and a perfect simplicity of motive in Emily; what she believed, she tried to practise; what she loved, she understood; and what she felt was beyond her, she did not fancy she could love. She had no notion of feeling anything because some one told her she ought to feel it: what was in her was real, and the rest she said 'she didn't understand, because she was not as good as Gwen.' "

"Oh, Paul, you cannot mean that you think Gwennie was not sincere."

"No, but that she was led, unconsciously. 'Insincere' would be too harsh a word. 'Unreal' would express my meaning better. Your influence made her delight in religion. Hugh was drawing her in the same direction—she is easily led, and if she had never left us all might have been well. But I confess I do fear that new friends may draw her in quite a contrary direction, and that she will give poor Hugh a sore heart yet."

"What is it you fear?"

"If this Colonel Atheling, of whom Emily speaks so much and Gwenevere not at all, has made up his mind to marry her—which is very likely,—I have but little hope for Hugh. Lady Le Mesurier

has got rid of Emily, you may remark. I feel convinced that they have seen the weakness of the poor girl's character, and will get their own way with her."

"It always appeared to me that Gwenevere influenced Emily. How often have they come to me to confess some childish fault, and Emily would say, 'Gwen didn't want to do it, Mammie,—she ought not to be punished; I *would* go on.'"

"Yes; but Gwen only remonstrated, and Emily always confessed."

"You have thought this for some time, I suppose; for I remember when I said to you that I had always hoped that Claud would like Gwenevere, you said that you were better pleased as things were."

"Yes, I remember feeling that."

"Well, if my dear Gwennie is led away, I shall have but little hope for Claud!"

"We shall see. No doubt Emily has her temptations too. I wonder, does she write regularly to him?"

"I do not know; his letters are cheerful. I will ask him when I write to-morrow."

She asked the question, and in reply Claud wrote: "When she first went to Fairminster, Emily told me that she would write only once a week, as there was no use in vexing her Aunt by a constant correspondence. But I enclose you her

last, that you may see how little reason I have to complain. Return it to me, please. I am preparing a delightful surprise for my little Firefly."

Mrs. Darnell unfolded the thick packet enclosed: six sheets closely covered, a little bit written every night. Everything that interested her, every one she met, her work, her painting, the books she read—all, in short, that went to make up her life, was put down each day, with the single idea, apparently, of making him share alike in her pleasures and her worries. Little pen-and-ink sketches of people and places came in here and there. Mrs. Appleby, Colonel Atheling, the Eustaces,—all were as well known to Claud as to the girl herself. There was hardly an expression of affection in it, from "My dear Claud" at the beginning, to "Your affectionate Emily" at the end; but the writer of that letter plainly looked upon herself as so completely belonging to her lover, that her life and his were common property. For her remarks and questions showed that she knew all about his doings, and felt a lively interest in them. Mrs. Darnell did not show that letter to Hugh Vincent.



CHAPTER X

CASTLE DERING.

THE wedding at Castle Dering had been a quiet affair enough, but the ball was a very gay one, and Emily danced to her heart's content, and enjoyed herself greatly. She had been puzzled and half frightened by Gwenevere's unusual demeanour, but on reflection, she thought it might have been an involuntary expression of relief at Harold's absence. Not a word was said to her by either Gwenevere or Lady Le Mesurier about their visit to Saxelby; her first knowledge of that was from a letter written at Saxelby by her Aunt. There were a great many visitors staying at Castle Dering, and among them Sir Clarence Le Mesurier. Emily was aware that he stared at her rather more than was pleasant, though, apparently, it was done against his will, as he always left off in great haste and confusion when

she looked at him ; also, that he followed her about persistently. But she never imagined that all this was meant to express a serious admiration for her, as he seldom took the trouble to talk, and far from seeming anxious to gain her good opinion, took an evident delight in provoking her to snub him severely. She was popular among the young people, and enjoyed herself thoroughly. Little thought her new friends—as they told each other that “Le Mesurier was caught at last,” or speculated whether, being a stranger, little Miss Fane fancied that young Lord Dering meant anything by his gay attentions—that every scrap of her daily experience, which could amuse or interest him, was being written down at night for the delectation of a certain hard-working London Curate !

One morning, about four days after the wedding, several of the party had gone out for a brisk turn in the grounds before luncheon, and Emily was among them. Presently some one said, “The post has arrived ; I must go in.”

“I hope there is a letter for me,” said Emily, and turned towards the door ; but there was a general outcry, “Oh, don’t go in, Miss Fane !”—and she did not go ; but she wished she had courage to do so, for it *was* Claud’s day. Sir Clarence said nothing, but walked off lazily towards the house. He came back in five minutes, bringing a letter and a small parcel—evidently a book.

"Oh, thank you," exclaimed Emily, as he gave them to her, "thank you very much! My Aunt's writing," she said, in a tone of disappointment, when she saw the letter; but a glance at the writing on the cover of the book brought a light to her eyes, and a little colour to her cheeks.

"What *can* it be?" she whispered. And seeing a seat not far off, she left the party and sat down to open the parcel. It contained a small volume, beautifully bound in crimson velvet, with "Emily" in gold letters at the top, and beneath this, "'The Blind Martyr,' By C. Beresford."

"A book! Claud's Poem! He never told me he was going to publish it."

If Sir Clarence had been there to see her face at that moment, he might have received a useful hint; but he had gone on with the rest. They walked round a portion of the garden, and presently came back to the same path. But by that time Emily was reading her Aunt's letter with serene composure.

"What was ~~the~~ book, Emily?" asked Lady Frances.

"A poem, called 'The Blind Martyr.'"

"And you are not reading it!" cried Miss Frizelle, a pretty little girl, who, with two sisters, was of the party. "Which proves either that you are not poetical, or that you know the author, and think it will be dull."

"No, it proves another thing, quite different,—that I have read the poem before."

"Oh, I supposed it was something new!"

"So it is; but it was written two years ago at Silverton Parsonage, where Gwenevere and I lived. It is by Mr. Darnell's nephew, and he has sent me a copy."

"Very nice of the old gentleman," remarked Lord Dering, understanding her to say that Mr. Darnell had sent her a copy. "May I see it, Miss Fane? I say! Mr. Darnell has had it got up in style for you; for I do not suppose that the entire edition is bound in crimson velvet?"

"With 'Emily' on the top?" she answered, laughing. She perceived his mistake, but did not care to explain. Lord Dering opened the book, and a tall Miss Douglas looked over it with him. They both stood there quite silent after the first minute. Emily watched them, well pleased.

"I say, Frances," cried Lord Dering to his sister, "listen to this," and he began to read. One by one the rest became silent. Lord Dering had a remarkably fine voice, and read well (a most unusual accomplishment at his age), and the opening verses—in which a young Roman Patrician described to his promised wife the peace and resignation which the new and despised religion of Christ, learned from a slave, had brought him, in place

of the fierce despair and loathing of life which had possessed him until now, ever since he had become blind—lost nothing of their simple strength and music by his reading. Emily turned her face away and listened, feeling almost too happy: she knew every word of it, but it was delicious to see how it affected others.

"That is Poetry," said Lord Dering, drawing a long breath.

"It is beautiful," said many voices.

"I haven't an idea what it is all about," said Sir Clarence, disconsolately. "What does the fellow mean by saying, 'the light sown for the righteous springs for me'? Did he see, or did he remain blind?"

"Sir Clarence! He remained blind, of course!"

"Then why didn't he say so plainly, and then a fellow could understand him?"

Amid a general laugh, Emily took possession of her book, and they all walked on.

Some time later Lord Dering brought her half a dozen newspapers, and showed her their critiques on the "Blind Martyr." Some praised, some abused; but all acknowledged that there was considerable power in the new poem. Emily's eyes sparkled. "Aunt Gundred won't be able to say he is nothing but a curate now!" thought she. Lord Dering watched her quietly, and mur-

mured, "Poor old Clarry." But she did not hear him.

Very soon came another letter from Lady Le Mesurier, to say that Mr. Atheling had begged her so earnestly not to leave him just yet, that she had written to Lady Marlinton, asking her to keep her visitor a few days longer. Lady Marlinton said, in her queer way, "I'm very glad to keep you, child. I like you. •Your poor mother was a goose, but you're a Fane. The Fanes all had brains. You can stick in a pin properly; they never come out again when you put 'em in." By which it will be seen that the old lady had adopted Emily as one of her special favourites, for such only were permitted to stick in her very troublesome pins. Emily was quite content to stay, but she wondered why Gwen did not write to her.

She was sitting in the deep window of the library that afternoon, finishing a copy, in water-colours, of a beautiful "Madonna and Child" which hung in that room. Her copy was many sizes smaller than the original, and, of course, less finished, but she had caught the expression of the faces wonderfully. Sir Clarence presently came into the room, came behind her, and gazed at the drawing.

"I like that," said he. "But the hand,—are you sure you have it right?"

If Nerissa, the old lady's pet Persian Cat, had suddenly spoken and displayed a knowledge of drawing, Emily could not have been more amazed.

"I am quite sure that I have it wrong," she answered, frankly. "I have had it out three times, and even now it is all wrong."

He sauntered away to look at the picture; then, taking up a bit of charcoal, he roughly sketched the hand on a loose sheet of card which lay beside her.

"Look," he said, "it's the foreshortening that has bothered you. Awful bother foreshortening is. Why couldn't the fellow let the hand lie along, naturally? But you'll never get it in now; you'd have a hole in your paper."

"I see my mistake now," she said, looking at his sketch. "I am so short-sighted that I really thought the hand was as I have it, only it would not come right? What shall I do? for I might not get the faces so well again?"

"Easy enough. Alter this drapery a little. So. Draw the blue thing over the hand. Yes; now won't that do?"

"Beautifully! and thank you ever so much. But, Sir Clarence, I never imagined you could draw?"

"I can draw—almost by nature," he said, "and ride, drive, swim, and—play croquet. That's all,

I think. No ; cricket, when it's not too hot. So, you do not leave Castle Dering yet ? ”

“ No, I am glad to say ; it is very pleasant.”

He nodded. “ I was also going ; but now I mean to stay.”

Emily, being busy with the blue drapery, did not answer.

“ I think,” he added, deliberately, “ that I shall stay as long as you do, Miss Fane.”

His voice sounded so changed that Emily started and looked up. He was standing in his favourite attitude, with his hands in his pockets, and he nodded to her when their eyes met.

“ As long as you do,” he said. “ Do you twig ? ”

“ Twig ! What on earth *do* you mean by that ? ” she said, angrily.

“ Don't you ? I hope you will some day. I— I'm in earnest, upon my honour.” And this strange young gentleman walked away in his usual leisurely fashion. Emily stared, then went on with her drapery, and very soon had forgotten his queer manner and strange words in the interest of her work.

Next day, Emily sent Patty to Moorside to bring her some dresses she had left at home, not expecting to be absent so long ; and Patty came back in a state of excitement which emboldened her to forget that her mistress had desired her never

to repeat the gossip of the servants' hall. She began, while dressing Emily for dinner,—

"Oh, Miss Fane! I want to tell you something that I heard to-day."

"Anything interesting, Patty?"

"I don't know what you'll say to it, Ma'am. It's gossip, and you always say to tell you no gossip, but I hope you will let me tell you this."

"I suppose," said Emily, looking round at her, "that you think I ought to know it."

"I should be easier in my mind if you did, Miss Emily. You know my Lady and Miss Gwennie took Hortongs with them, and left the other French-woman at home—Fongjet I mean. Well, I got to Moorside, Ma'am; just as they were going to dinner. Mrs. Hingston not being there, she having gone to meet the young lady from India, the servants were talking freer than usual, and Fongjet said she'd a letter from Hortongs with news in it. 'We'll be having a marriage and a wedding,' says she, 'as well as the people at the Castle.' And the story goes, Miss Emily, that Miss Gwenever is engaged to Colonel Atheling, and Hortongs says it is a secret as yet, but she knows it is true."

"Nonsense," said Emily.

"So it is, Miss; and then they said—for I may as well tell you the whole of it—that you will not be long after Miss Atheling. And they named Sir Clarence Le Mesurier, Miss."

"If the first story is as true as the second, we need not trouble ourselves about either of them," said Emily quietly. But she felt uneasy. "What did you say?"

"That I didn't believe a word of it, Miss. I gave no reasons; only said time would tell."

"You did quite right; and you were right in telling me, too. Give me my gloves, Patty; and you may go now."

For a few minutes she stood before the fire, thinking. "I must warn Gwen," she said. "If this was said of me, there may be nothing in what they say of her, either. I wish I could get this horrid fear out of my head: it must be all fancy, and I must be very bad to have such fancies. It can't be true; she nearly broke her heart at leaving Hugh—she is so innocent, so good. I'll just write a line to her at once; there is time enough."

She sat down and wrote rapidly.

"MY DEAR GWEN,

"I have just heard a silly report which I think you ought to know. The servants at Moor-side are saying that you are to be married to Harold. As they also have an absurd story about me, I must myself follow the advice I am giving you—be on your guard and raise no false hopes. I am dressed for dinner and must go down, so

excuse this hurried line, but I know you would rather know that this is said.

Ever your affectionate

"EMILY FANE."

She rang the bell while folding and addressing her letter. Patty made her appearance.

"Patty, get that posted to-night for me. Get some one to go to the village with it at once, it will be in time for the London post. Here is half-a-crown for the messenger."

She ran down to the drawing-room, murmuring, "She is warned now. I can do no more."

All that evening Emily honestly tried to be cold and distant to Sir Clarence, but she found that it was of no use. He seemed to like it, and to have a positive appetite for snubs and slights. To her increased disgust, she now observed that others were aware of his attentions, and that Lord Dering seemed to think that he was behaving with uncommon discretion in ceasing to engross her himself. Poor little Emily, she positively cried with vexation when she went to bed that night: but she was by no means the girl to do nothing *but* cry. Lady Frances was going to Fairminster the next morning, and Emily said she would go with her, as she wished to visit the Eustaces.

"You promised to walk to the Black Tor with us," began several voices.

"I did not promise to do it to-day. Won't some other day do? or can we go in the afternoon? I believe we shall be back in time for luncheon."

"Then we will have luncheon early," said Lord Dering, "and then set out. There is an early moon, and it will be very pleasant. Don't dare to be late, Frances, unless you want to feel the weight of my severest displeasure."

Arrived at Fairminster, Lady Frances went off on a shopping tour, and Emily to the Deanery. She found Mrs. Eustace, Rosa, and little Sophy in the pleasant room I have described: the Dean was not at home, and Mary was gone—she was half way to India. Rosa looked miserably ill, and seemed almost too much depressed to speak. Emily, finding conversation seemed to make her worse, went to the piano, and sang "He shall feed His flock," of which Rosa was never tired.

"Nothing cheers my poor girl so much as your visits, Emily," said Mrs. Eustace.

"I wish, then," said Emily blushing, "that you would ask me to come to you until my Aunt comes home: do, Mrs. Eustace, please."

"Would you really come?" cried Rosa.

"Leave all your gaieties, my dear!" added her mother. "You are very kind, but I do not like to let you do that. We are so very quiet here."

"But Mrs. Eustace, I really want to come. I

came here to-day partly to see if you would have me: and it is too lovely to find that you really wish for me. I want to leave Castle Dering."

"But what will your Aunt say?"

"I think she may be vexed, but I cannot help it. I want very much to leave Castle Dering."

"But, excuse me, my dear, is it not rather an independent step for a young girl to take? You say Lady Le Mesurier wrote about your remaining there."

"It is rather an independent step, but so much the better. I cannot explain, dear Mrs. Eustace, but I want to do something decided. Believe me, I have good reason."

"I suppose I understand, in part. We shall be very glad to have you, my dear, if you can get Lady Marlinton to let you come to us. You must not leave her without her consent; but you will find her wise and kind. The Dean has the highest opinion of her."

"But I hope you will be able to come," said poor Rosa, eagerly.

"I think you will see me to-morrow," said Emily, smiling. Lady Frances called for her soon after this, and they drove back to Castle Dering. The walk to the Black Tor was very pleasant; the only discontented person was Sir Clarence, who hated walking, and therefore felt it hard that,

when he had made such an unwonted effort, the one person whose company he desired should go springing and running and scampering about with the three Miss Frizelles, who hadn't an ounce of brains among them, leaving him to toil painfully along the beaten path beside Miss Douglas, who was clever, and whom he hated.

That evening, Emily quietly slipped away from the drawing-room, and betook herself to old Lady Marlinton's dressing-room, whither the old lady always retired until the gentlemen left the dining-room, for she required a little rest after the fatigues of dinner.

"May I come in?" said Emily, peeping in. "I will not disturb you long, but I want to speak to you."

"Come in, child. I'm not sleepy, as it happens. Just wait until I am comfortable—there, that's the—— Oh, there's a villainous pin sticking into my spine! Thank you, love. Is it a pin of any consequence? I think not. Throw it in the fire, and don't tell Frances. Well, Miss, what mischief are you in, that you come to consult the fairy godmother?"

"I am in no mischief," said Emily. "What a nice opinion you seem to have of me! I only want to ask you something. I went to see the Eustaces to-day. You know Mary is married

and gone to India, and poor Rosa is fretting so dreadfully that she looks quite ill."

"Rosa—that's the cripple?"

"Yes. And she is fond of me; and Mrs. Eustace would be so glad to have me with her until Aunt Gundred comes home. Will you think me very rude, Lady Marlinton, if I ask you to let me go to her?"

The little old lady stretched out a brown and withered hand, and took the girl by her soft white arm, drawing her near.

"Kneel down here, Miss Emily, so that I may see your face. Now, you monkey, what do you mean by this? Mind, you may as well tell me the truth, because I shall see it in your foolish little phiz."

"I always speak the truth; but I don't always tell everything," said Emily, looking at her.

"I dare say not! But you are in my charge, madam! And besides, I like you, child. Tell me why you want to go. I dare say it is a good reason, but your Aunt would not be pleased. Our dear Gundred likes to be obeyed."

"But I am not bound to obey her like a slave. You know, Lady Marlinton, I am very nearly twenty."

"Are you? You don't look it. But you are not to marry until you are twenty-five,—is that true?"

"No; that is Gwen. I may not marry without her consent until I am twenty-three. But I am not a child, and I do not mean to behave like one. Aunt Gundred is very kind, and if this annoys her I am sorry. Only, indeed I want to go."

"You have enjoyed being here, have you not?"

"Very much—ever so much; and I hope you will ask me again."

"Emily Fane, I am a very inquisitive old woman, but I have one virtue—I never betray secrets. You may trust me. Tell me your reason for wanting to go, and I will tell you whether I can consent or not."

Emily reddened, but answered frankly—

"I will; but do not betray me, for if I am mistaken I might get laughed at. I find that people are saying that—that Sir Clarence Le Mesurier——"

"Well? there's nothing dreadful in that, child. He is a good fellow—rich—beautiful place—good family—and he has never been seriously caught before, that I know of."

"You think it so, then? I was in hopes it was all a mistake. But now I really do hope you will let me go away."

"But why, little goosie? You will hardly do better, and your Aunt wishes it, I know."

"My Aunt knows that it cannot be."

"No, she does not, my dear. You may take my word for that."

"She knows that I shall marry some one else," said Emily, bravely. "She would not let it be called an engagement: but we *were* engaged, and mean to be again."

"Eh—who is it? You little sinner! POOR Gundred!—but you say she knows it?"

"Of course she does—there was no concealment about it. You know she was always my guardian. She was asked for her consent a long time ago, and gave it. Then, we were too poor; and when I got this money, she wished me to wait and make sure that I really preferred to keep my word. I write to him, and he writes to me, and Aunt Gundred knows it. So I think she can have no idea of—what you say."

"What is he, my dear?"

"A clergyman, nephew to Mr. Darnell, and his name is Beresford. He wrote that poem that every one is talking about"—this was said with great pride. "He is very clever and very good—strong, and grave, and manly. He is not a man to be forgotten; and no one who has been loved by my Claud would ever *look* at Sir Clarence Le Mesurier." And tears filled the girl's eyes as she spoke.

"You're a dear little goosie," said the old lady, "and I shan't mind playing our dear Gundred a trick, because she had no business to assure me that you were not engaged if she knew all this. It strikes me, too, that though you are a merry little cricket, Mistress Emily, you know your own mind and will go your own way ; and if you really mean to be faithful to this Poet-Curate of yours, no doubt your plan is a good one. It may give Sir Clarence a hint, whereby an explanation may be avoided, and that may make things easier for you with your Aunt. So say nothing, my dear, but tell your maid to pack up. I will send you into Fairminster to-morrow after breakfast. Tell me, child,—your cousin, Miss Atheling, has she a curate in reserve too ? "

"I must not tell any one's secrets but my own," replied Emily, laughing.

"There is a curate, then ? "

"No ; there really is not. Thank you very much, dear Lady Marlinton ; and don't forget to ask me to come here some other time, for I have been very happy here."

"I will ; you are a good child, and I like you : but Gundred Le Mesurier will get her own way in spite of you."

"No, she won't ! even if she has an own way in the matter, which I can hardly believe, because I have told her frankly what I mean to do."

"Well, my dear, we shall see. I'm a romantic old woman, and so I hope you'll keep your word, just for the honour of our sex. But if you don't, you may depend upon my silence. No one shall know from me one word of our talk to-night. But when you are the reigning Lady Le Mesuricr, I shall twit you with it."

"So you may," replied Emily, as she left the room. She gave her orders to Patty, bidding her say nothing to the other servants. Also she wrote to her Aunt, telling her of the Eustaces' invitation, and saying that, although it was very pleasant at Castle Dering, she was glad to go, for a reason which she would give when they met, if asked. Lady Marlinton approved, she added, and so she hoped that her independent proceeding might be forgiven.

And the next day, soon after breakfast, Lady Frances set off to finish her shopping, and to leave Emily at the Deanery. Sir Clarence remained in blissful ignorance of her departure, having ridden over to his own place in consequence of a report that a stable-boy had been seen galloping Bajazet the Second—a young horse on which great hopes were built—in an unrighteous and furious fashion over the Moor. Lord Dering joined all the other young people in being sorry to lose Emily, but, for some reason which he refused to confide to any one,

he was moved to shouts of unseemly laughter when saying good-bye.

"Dering," said his grandmother, severely, "you always *were* a donkey."

"Yes, Gran dear, an awful ass, certainly. Haw, haw! I'm off again. Do something to me, somebody, or I shall have a fit."

"Come close enough, dear, and I shall have great pleasure in boxing your ears," said the old lady, mildly. "There; the carriage is at the door, little Emily, and I hope you'll come again some day. When Miss Eustace does not want you," she added demurely.

"Nice old body my revered Gran is, Miss Fane," said Lord Dering, as he went downstairs with Emily.

"Indeed she is!" she answered, heartily. "She has been very kind to me."

"And will you remember this?" he said quite seriously: "if (as is nearly certain) you hear motives attributed to her which she did not avow to you, in this matter, take my word for it, she told you the truth. She really does, don't you know? and she looks so witchlike that no one believes it, but it really is a fact. She talks in a wondrous worldly manner sometimes, and is, in her heart, the most romantic old darling extant."

"But I don't know what you are talking about," Emily answered, laughing.

"No, no. You're nearly as deep as my Gran—very nearly. Ha, ha, ha! my sides ache with laughter. Good-bye, Miss Fane; don't forget us. Haven't we had a jolly time of it. And I say"—coming close to the carriage door with a confidential air, and whispering, "have you no message to leave for Le Mesurier, you know?"

"Dering, take care; the wheel will be over your foot," cried Lady Frances. "Is he in his right mind, Miss Fane? Do look back at him; how he roars. The servants are quite puzzled, and no wonder."





CHAPTER XI.

CHANGED.

NO answer came to Emily's letter to her Aunt, nor did Gwenevere write. But for an uncomfortable feeling about Gwenevere, Emily would have been very happy at the Deanery, where she felt more at home than she had done since she left dear peaceful Silverton. She sang for Rosa, told stories to Sophy, read the "Blind Martyr" to them (and betrayed her secret before she reached the end, though they did not tell her so), and, in short, she made herself very pleasant, and gained all hearts. The two sons of the family who were at home—John, who was his father's curate, and Frank, who was reading for the Bar—quite shared in the general liking for her; though she made Mr. Frank, who was a terrible flirt, understand that he was not to flirt with her. The Dean delighted in her, and soon perceiving

that her wish to be of some use was quite sincere, he told her that he had found out something which she could do, which would really be a work of charity, and yet to which Lady Le Mesurier could make no objection. He introduced her to a wee little old lady, the daughter of a bygone Dean, whose very name had been forgotten in Fairminster when this poor little lady, the last of a large family, came back there to live on her annuity of seventy pounds a year, because, as she said, "in Fairminster, Dean Spratt's name must always confer respectability, even in reduced circumstances." But, alas! no one remembered Dean Spratt, who had been dead for fifty years; and his poor little daughter did not find seventy pounds a year go further there than elsewhere.

"She is the loneliest little creature in the world," said the Dean, "and knows no one here. Mary used to visit her sometimes, and if you will do the same, you will really brighten her life."

"I will, indeed; but, you know I told you I really want to learn how to visit and do good in a town parish. Do you seriously think I ought not to undertake more than this?"

"Not against your Aunt's will. You are living in her house, and she is your guardian, and for these reasons you ought to respect her wishes. Never fear," he added, smiling; "either you will

learn in time, or else you will find that you don't need to learn. These things, great and small, are all ordered for us."

"I know that ; and yet I feel as if I were living such an idle, self-seeking life. Not the life for a Christian woman, I am tempted to say."

"You did not choose it ; it was chosen for you, my child. If you had duties elsewhere and were neglecting them to amuse yourself here, it would be different. But you did not choose it, and you can only escape from it by living through it. You need not live for yourself ; no life can force you to do that. Come here, and I will show you a drawing which I value particularly."

He opened a large portfolio which stood on an easel in a corner, and she saw a large water-coloured copy of a celebrated original, "Faith and Reason," done by no mean artist. Emily had never seen even a print of it, and she drew a long breath, and stood silent before it. Faith and Reason—both in mid-stream, on half-seen stepping stones, with wild brown water foaming round their feet. Reason, a strong man in full armour, with stern brow and anxious eyes, gazing down into the waves, stepping from stone to stone warily and firmly. Faith, in white robe, and with placid face uplifted to the light from the sky above her ; no anxiety about her present footing, no fears about

the next step. Her foot stood firm, her eyes were on the promised glory; not for her the choosing of the steps to the distant shore. Emily gazed long; at last she said—

"May I copy this?"

"You may; but take it to your room, my dear. It would pain my wife to see it. It was done for us by our dear boy, Tom; and now we hardly know whether he is alive or dead.* He had a rare genius. Will you pray for him, Emily, while you work at your copy?"

"I will always pray for him," she whispered softly.

She carried off the precious drawing, and made an excellent copy; by rising very early, she had time to work at it without exciting any suspicion. Her visit lasted much longer than she had expected, for Lady Le Mesurier remained a long time at Saxelby, and then stayed in London with one of her step-daughters, so that Emily began to think she never meant to come home at all. Before she left the Deanery, she had become a very welcome visitor to Miss Spratt, and had also undertaken the charge of a little parish library, which Mary Eustace had always managed, and which was open in a small room in the Cathedral, every Friday after Morning Service. To this she thought Lady Le Mesurier could not object.

All this time Gwenevere never wrote, and Lady Le Mesurier but seldom, and very briefly. Emily concluded that she was in dire disgrace with her Aunt, and did not like to imagine Gwenevere's reasons for silence. I had almost forgotten to say that she saw Sir Clarence several times, but only in the Cathedral; he did not come to the Deanery, and made no attempt to speak to her. The truth was, that in anguish of spirit at her departure, he had written to his Aunt, telling her what he had said to Emily in the library, and how her manner to him had changed at once. Lady Le Mesurier, in reply, advised him to let things remain as they were until her return, and added, "You probably startled her, and I must confess you behaved rather like the Sultan, throwing his handkerchief to the favoured fair one, than was likely to please a high-spirited girl like Emily."

So matters stood, when Emily was surprised by a note from her Aunt.

"Moorside House.

"MY DEAR EMILY,

"We have at last come home, and I dare say you are quite ready to rejoin us. You were a very naughty girl to run away from Castle Dering in a fright, and I meant to scold you, but am too happy to do so. Will you let Mrs. Appleby

know of my return, and come home to-morrow? I will send the carriage for you at one o'clock. Say something civil for me to Mrs. Eustace, as I do not care to have a coldness with her; but it was very odd of her to invite you away from the friends to whom I entrusted you. Lady Marlinton's conduct I can quite understand. •

"Your affectionate Aunt,

"GUNDREDA LE MESURIER."

So the quiet time was over, and Emily felt certain that something far less pleasant was coming. She restored the drawing to the portfolio that evening, when only the Dean was in the room.

"I think I see the lesson in it," she said. "I am to do as I am bid, and not want to be at work."

"You are to let the work be chosen for you; your present work may be to conquer your restless will. Only do not forget one thing, my dear. Faith is going on all the time. She keeps her eyes upon the guiding light, and goes on steadily, though without apparent effort."

Emily repeated the lines—

"Faith has a prudence of her own,
Her step is firm and free.
Yet there is cautious science, too,
In her simplicity."

"I am not sure I have that right, but I have the hymn at home. It suits this picture. I am so sorry to leave you all, Mr. Dean," she added suddenly.

"To take the next step? We are sorry to lose you ; you have done Rosa real good. I do not know how it was, but Mary, though so devoted to the dear child, never could manage her. I think she pitied her too openly. Rosa is wonderfully cheerful now."

"May I say just *one* thing?—never seem to expect her to mind things. I am sure it is a bad plan."

"I dare say. I will speak to Sophy and her mother. And now, while we are still alone, one word more—it is not so much what you are doing, as why you do it, that matters."

The carriage came for Emily punctually next day, and at the same hour Mrs. Appleby, as round and as brisk as ever, marched up the steps of the Deanery. Emily was in the hall, saying a last word to Sophy, who was tearfully inclined, and said it was like Mary being married over again. The Dean was there too, waiting until this affecting scene was over, to put his guest into the carriage.

"Just caught you, Miss Fane," cried the Animated No. "I had your note last night, and

seeing the Fairminster carriage coming here, I thought I would go out with you, for I'm longing to see dear Gundred."

I regret to say that Emily made a most expressive little grimace at Sophy before she turned to reply to this address. Sophy was nearly choked between laughing and crying.

"Very well, Mrs. Appleby," replied Emily. "There is plenty of room, and I am sure my Aunt will be glad to see you."

"I don't think so," was the reply; but, after a moment's thought, Mrs. Appleby added, "for I have something to tell her which will annoy her."

Now, as nothing more was ever heard of this annoying news, Emily afterwards concluded that the worthy woman, having uttered the contradiction mechanically, had felt obliged, on second thoughts, to account for it.

Leaving Emily to her pleasant drive, I must tell you how the morning had passed at Moorside. Colonel Atheling had come with the two ladies. Gwenevere did not come down to breakfast that morning, as she was very tired. The meal was hardly over when Sir Clarence walked in. He was even more taciturn than his wont, and Colonel Atheling felt himself in the way; so as soon as he could retire from the scene, he did so.

"Look here, Aunt Gundred," began Sir Clarence

with unwonted vigour, "what did she mean by it?"

"What did who mean—and by what? You are enigmatical, my dear boy."

"Why, I wrote to you about it."

"I answered your letter, did I not?"

"What did Miss Fane mean by leaving Castle Dering in that way? She never told me she was thinking of such a thing."

"But, my good Sir, was she in any way bound, so to do?"

"No, I know that, of course. But, Aunt Gundred, I am in earnest. When I talked to you about her before, and asked you if she were engaged, I did not care so much about it but that I could have drawn back without more than a little annoyance; but it is very different now. Knowing that the coast was clear, I have really—gone in for it, don't you know? I have watched her, and listened to her talk—plenty of it to listen to, for the little tongue runs on gaily,—and I have made up my mind. She's as good as she's pretty; she is clever and pleasant, and I mean to make her my wife if I can. And I thought I had just opened the trenches, as it were, when, behold, the next thing I hear is that she is gone!"

Lady Le Mesurier hardly knew him. His face was positively animated, his eyes awake, his voice

earnest. She even began to feel frightened. What if Emily proved obstinately blind to the advantages offered her? His heart was set on her now, and when he discovered the truth he would blame her—Lady Le Mesurier—which would be very hard, as she was only working for his good, and had, moreover, said nothing that was untrue, in the letter. She felt that she must walk warily, and, to gain time, she laughed gently, and said—

"Why, Clarence, I cannot believe that this is you. Where is your magnificent *nil admirari* air now?"

"It is gone, for I have found something worth admiring and being in earnest about. Don't laugh at me, I am really in earnest. Why did she leave Castle Dering?"

"Her reason, as given to me, was that Rosa Eustace was very low, and that Mrs. Eustace had asked her to go to them. She said she had reasons for wishing to go, but she did not enter into them. I am rather displeased about it; not so much with Emily—who is very ignorant of the ways of the world, and acted, I suspect, under the influence of others,—but with Mrs. Eustace and Lady Marlington."

"But what do you suppose were her reasons—Miss Fane's?"

"I think she took fright at your attentions."

"Then she must like some one else."

"Or she *must* like you? Is there no third course open to her? And suppose she were quietly informed that you had paid much the same attentions to Miss This and Lady The-other, meaning nothing by them? Emily is young, timid, and inexperienced—just the girl to act in a hasty way."

"But who would tell her stories of this kind? I see no possible motive."

"Do you not? My innocent youth! Lady Constance has just made a bad match—they may wish Lady Frances to make a better. Lord Dering has been extravagant and idle—a nice little wife with some money would not come amiss. Do you see now?"

"I suppose I do. Yes, old Lady Marlinton is just the woman to have plans and plots; she looks like a witch, exactly. Then you think I need not be too much alarmed?"

"Not if I am right in my conjectures. I shall make an opportunity to say, before Emily, that you have not been unduly given to flirtation, but I shall not inquire into her mysterious reasons, but just pass it over as a girlish caprice."

"And what do you advise me to do?"

"To have patience. Some girls take a great deal more wooing than others, and I am not sure

but that they are the best worth wooing and winning. Now, by your own account, you have been looking about for a wife for some time, and, having found a girl whom you think you would like, you forget altogether that there are two sides to the question, and expect her to be ready to make up her mind in a moment. Emily is worth a little trouble."

"I am ready to take any amount of trouble, if I only knew how to set about it."

"Begin by letting her forget your impetuous proceedings at Castle Dering. Then very quietly let her see that you like and admire her, but say nothing decided unless you have reason to think she is encouraging you. Any help that I can give you, I will ; but that I need not tell you. It may take time, but you will not mind that."

The poor fellow looked wistfully at her.

"People say, you know," said he, "that you make or mar the Fairminster marriages as you like ; so I hope you'll *make* this one."

"I think," she replied, laughing, "that I get the credit of a good deal that I never dreamed of. And now I must tell you some news."

But I shall not tell that news just yet.

Emily arrived presently, and found both Sir Clarence and Harold Atheling with her Aunt. Lady Le Mesurier welcomed her kindly, and told

her that Gwenevere was upstairs and wanted her. Then she took Mrs. Appleby off to her private room for a consultation—about some purchases she had made in London, she said.

Emily ran upstairs, all in a glow of pleasure, to find her dear Gwen. Alas, poor Emily! the dear Gwen of Silverton—the sweet, loving, happy companion of her happy youth—was as much a thing of the past as if she had found her lying in her coffin. Not that Emily found it out at once. Gwenevere was sitting at the writing-table, with a litter of papers before her; and she sprang up when the door opened, and threw her arms round her Cousin, holding her fast and kissing her with nervous affection. Her lips felt hot on the soft cool cheek, and Emily pushed her a little away, to look at her.

"My darling," she cried, "you are not well! You have been feeling ill, Gwen, and would not write, to make me uneasy. Does Aunt Gundred know that you are ill?"

"Nonsense, dear; I am quite well. I never felt better in my life. You made me start by opening the door so suddenly, that is all."

"That *cannot* have made you thin, Gwennie. You are dreadfully thin."

"Oh, no; this dress never fitted me. Come to the fire, Emily, and don't keep staring at me. You make me quite nervous."

"Yes, let us sit down and have a comfortable gossip. What a time it is since we had one! I have so much to tell you ~~that~~ I was afraid to write, particularly when you never—— But," she exclaimed, breaking off suddenly, "where are the photographs—Bertha and Maria? I certainly left them safe on the chimney-piece."

"I took them, Emily."

"Oh; all right, then. I was afraid the servants had been meddling; but you have the best right to them, of course. I suppose you have put them in the pretty new book I see there? Is this a London purchase? Sky-blue satin and mother-of-pearl—very pretty; but, oh, you extravagant girl!"

She took it up: there was but one photograph in it, and it was one of Harold Atheling.

"You have put none of our own in yet," she said. "This is a very good one of Harold. Oh, I see, he gave you the book."

"From Harold to Gweneverc" was written on the fly-leaf, and beneath the words a date. Emily looked grave; she began to fear that Gwen had disregarded her warning. She looked at her. Gwen was very white, and she raised a screen which she had taken up, rather hastily, when she met the earnest look of those pretty shortsighted eyes. On the hand which held the screen she

wore a beautiful pearl hoop, which Emily had never seen before. Emily started, and blushed furiously for very shame at the thought which had crossed her mind. She went to the other side of the fire, and sat down. Being now close to Gwenevere, she saw how very nervous she looked.

"Gwen," she whispered, "if you are not ill, you are unhappy. Will you not tell me what is wrong?"

"I am perfectly happy. I never was so happy in my life. I never knew how happy I could be until now," Gwenevere said, vehemently. "Did not Aunt Gundred tell you?—but no, of course she did not, for I told her not; I wanted to tell you myself."

"To tell me what?" Emily said, going up to her, and kneeling on the rug before her. "Tell me, Gwen?"

"Can you not guess?" asked Gwenevere, trying to speak lightly, trying not to shrink from the straightforward gaze of those pure eyes.

"I will not guess," Emily answered. "I think, Gwen, that you are ashamed to tell me."

"I have no reason to be ashamed. The shame does not lie with me"—she spoke readily now, like one who has learned a lesson by rote,—but with those who allowed young girls to associate with people so far beneath them in social standing,

and with those who would have sealed our fate before we were at all in a position to judge for ourselves. *They* may be ashamed, but I am not! I am only thankful—most thankful, that my eyes are opened in time."

"Go on, Gwenevere," said Emily, quietly, "say the rest of your lesson. These words are not your own."

"I have learned no lesson—I have only learned to know my own mind. And—and—oh, can you not guess, Emily? You are very unkind. I have promised to marry Harold."

Emily looked at her once, and then her eyes went down, and her face glowed crimson. Any one would have thought, to look at them, that *she* was the culprit, making a shameful confession, as she knelt before that queenly figure in the arm-chair. After a short silence, during which Gwenevere never moved, Emily rose and went back to her seat.

"Gwen," she said softly, "you don't mean me to believe this of you?"

"I do, certainly. And I sincerely hope, Emily, that you will try to be reasonable, and to look at things in a sensible way yourself. Mrs. Darnell was much to blame for——"

"Oh, Gwenevere, don't! You *can't* be so changed all in a moment from what you once

were. By-and-by you will be so ashamed of these words. Think of all the love and care and motherly thought that Mammie spent upon us all these years! If we had been her own daughters, she could have done no more."

"If we had been her own daughters, Claud Beresford and—Mr. Vincent would have been very suitable *partis* for us."

"*That* comes from Aunt Gundred. You are an apt scholar, Gwenevere. But you will please to leave Claud's name out of the question altogether. My education not having advanced as far as yours, I might get angry."

"You are angry as it is," said Gwenevere.

"If I were not so shocked, so frightened, I should be angry, I suppose. Oh, Gwennie, Gwennie, be yourself again. This cold, heartless woman of the world is not my sister Gwenevere. Think of Hugh—poor Hugh—and all your promises and vows of affection. I know that the Vincents are not well-born people, but Hugh is a gentleman—you know he is; and you made yourself necessary to him—you let him love you."

"Hush!" said Gwenevere, rising; "you are very cruel, Emily. I have said all this to myself often enough. I must speak plainly, I suppose. I fancied I loved Hugh, because I knew no better. I know he loves me, and I am sorry for it. But

do you think he would wish to marry me now that I know that it was not love on my part, but only idleness and gratified vanity,—now that I do love Harold? He would not wish to marry me now, even if I were fool enough to do it."

"You have quite determined, then, to cast him off? Oh, I find it very hard to believe it! Why, they all thought at home—I know they did—that the parting grieved you far more than it did me."

"I was frightened, I think. I hated the idea of change. But now—oh, how thankful I am that it came in time!"

"I feel so puzzled," Emily said, wearily. "I do not half believe it yet. Have you written to break off your engagement? Gwen, do one thing for my sake. If you have not written, wait one week; let us talk together, and see if the true old love does not awake again."

"There is no engagement," Gwenevere replied; "and I promised to send back those letters to-day,"—pointing to the table. "And as to waiting a week, I cannot do that, Emily; for Harold has accepted the post of military secretary to the new Governor-General, and we are to be married at once, that I may go out with him."

Emily clasped her hands, crying—

"And you don't see why they hurry it on in this indecent manner? You are going to walk willingly

into the trap set for you—going to make your name a byword for faithlessness, and your life nothing but an outward show of happiness and grandeur, while in your heart you will hear Hugh's voice reproaching you, and before your eyes will be the vision of his heart-broken face as long as you live. For I cannot believe, I will not believe, that you are as bad as you think yourself. I will not believe that you can forget his love and break his heart without one pang of grief in your own. If you can, you are unworthy of the very name of woman, and your fair face hides a heart as black as midnight."

Gwenevere was standing beside the writing-table, for she had gone over to it as if to finish her task there: but she stood spell-bound while these fiery words were poured forth: and when she would have answered, she seemed unable to speak. Suddenly she stretched out her hand as if to grasp the back of the chair, but failing to do so, she fell to the ground, and lay there, very white and still. In the terror of the moment, Emily rang the bell frantically—afterwards she wished she had not done so, but probably no appeal would have stopped Gwenevere now. Not only Hortense and Patty, but Lady Le Mesurier also, came at the sound.

"What is the matter—Gwenevere ill? What

has happened to her? She was quite well not an hour ago."

She looked at Emily, as much as to say, "This is your doing, you troublesome elf." Emily was too terribly frightened to mind her looks: she helped to lift Gwenevere, who was carried into her own room and laid on the bed. She began to revive at once, and Emily whispered—

"Gwennie dear, I was too hard upon you: you *will* do right, I know: you have only been over-persuaded."

But Gwenevere's first act was to turn away from her, and her first words, "Where is Aunt Gundred?"

Lady Le Mesurier came to her side, and after a few whispered words, said—

"Now if you will all go quietly away, I will stay with Miss Atheling until she is quite well."

The maids disappeared at once, but Emily lingered. Lady Le Mesurier said gravely—

"You had better leave us now. Your violence has done quite harm enough for one day."

Poor Emily crept away to her own room, where she sat down and cried miserably. Her whole world seemed to be tumbling to pieces—she felt as if nothing would ever surprise her again. And yet, when she had collected her ideas, she found that she was more grieved than surprised, for

there had been many indications of Gwenevere's change of mind ; and besides, Emily had always known, without knowing that she knew, that Gwenevere was far too easily led and influenced by others. Perhaps she never had loved Hugh—not as Emily loved Claud. Perhaps Harold, with his grand air, his undoubted station and his wealth, suited her better than Hugh, who was just a simple, plain-mannered soldier, who had little save his love to give her. But he had given his love, and Gwenevere had greedily accepted it, absorbing him completely, and, at least, letting him and every one else believe that she returned it warmly : and it was cruel—cruel and unwomanly—to throw it back to him now, with cold disdain. Soft, gentle Gwenevere ! could she really do it ? Emily still hoped that she might persuade her to hesitate ; and remembering the papers on the writing-table, which Gwenevere had not sealed up, she rose, washed away the traces of tears from her face, and went back to the sitting-room to put them away. But she found her Aunt sitting at the writing-table, in the act of sealing up a small square parcel : and no letters or papers lay about.

“ Do you want to write, Emily ? ” inquired she blandly. “ I have just finished my task.”

“ Gwenevere left some letters lying about here, and I wanted to put them by,” faltered Emily.

"But you see I have done it. Gwenevere deputed me to do so: and to write a line to Mr. Vincent. She had written herself, but wished me to say a word or two; as, though there was no engagement, yet, as she had weakly allowed him to write to her, she thought it well to be explicit now: and Harold consented, on condition that she did it to-day."

"You have written! Aunt Gundred, I know Gwen better than you do, and I know that if she does this thing she will never be happy. I beseech you, don't send that letter until I have talked to her again."

"I really think, my dear, that you have talked to her quite enough, as you frightened the poor child into fits. I must forbid you to see her at present—she does not wish it herself. You must accept her decision, Emily; you have no right to interfere."

"Only the right of loving her."

"If you love her, do not risk her future happiness. The less Harold is made to dwell upon this very unfortunate affair, the better, for he is a very proud man. You may take my word for it that Gwenevere really prefers him; you may, by persisting in your present line of conduct, succeed in breaking off her engagement, but she certainly never will marry this farmer's son."

"Aunt Gundred, the day will come when you will be sorry for what you have done."

"I hardly expect it, my dear. I shall have to change very much first. Now I shall desire them to bring you something to eat, as luncheon is over. Gwenevere had begged to be allowed to tell you all herself, so I did not send for you when the bell rang. I wish I had insisted upon telling you myself, for you have been quite too much for my poor Gwenevere. She will not get up again until dinner time."

Lady Le Mesurier took up her neat little parcel and sailed away, leaving Emily very much quenched. Not since, when a fiery mite of seven years old, she had been sentenced to solitary confinement for boxing Gwennie's ears in a passion, had she felt so put down. After some time, she recovered herself sufficiently to think it just possible to disobey her Aunt, so she got up and went to the door of Gwenevere's room. It was bolted on the other side. That was enough. Gwennie plainly did not want to see her. She could do but one thing now, to lighten the blow to Hugh, and she did it. She wrote a few lines to Mrs. Darnell.

"DEAR MAMMIE,

"Try to comfort Hugh. He will get a

letter when you get this. Go to him and do not let him feel alone. There is no comfort, and no hope. I am so unhappy and frightened that I cannot write a long letter; but oh, Mammie, I wish we had never left you! All the pleasures I have enjoyed do not make up for the bitter pain of seeing Gwen so changed. How little I imagined why we were separated; and yet I suppose it would have come to the same thing in the end. Poor Gwenevere, she is throwing her life away: Harold Atheling has no tenderness in him, it will be all outside show. And you know what a dependent creature she is. Write to her, Mammie,—though I don't know why I ask you to do that, for her mind has been poisoned against us all. I have done all I could, and failed.

"Your affectionate child,

"EMILY FANE."





CHAPTER XII.

“HUGH IS HERE.”

WHEN Emily went down to dinner in the evening, she was actually glad to find that Mrs. Appleby had stayed to spend the day, for if no stranger had been present, her position would have been even less pleasant than it was. Harold was cold in his manner, and that little frown was very apparent. Gwenevere seemed to have a headache, and was very silent ; and they all treated her as a suffering martyr, and poor little Emily as the persecutor. Mrs. Appleby's chatter was of some use, for once. It was not until the next day that something which passed between Lady Le Mesurier and Harold, revealed to Emily that the wedding was to take place immediately.

Gwenevere was present. The girls had not met without witnesses since that stormy interview the

day before; for Gwenevere had gone to her own room at once, and had kept the door, which opened into the sitting-room, locked. Of course, as there was a second door, Emily could have found her way in, but she did not choose to do so. She had not been attending to the conversation, but hearing the words, "special licence," and "return before Wednesday," she pricked up her ears. This was Saturday; it was impossible that their meaning was that next Wednesday was to be the wedding-day. Meeting her wondering look, Colonel Atheling smiled, and said, more in his own manner than he had spoken to her of late—

"I suppose Emily, being in practice, is quite up to *her* duty."

"What duty?" said Emily. He looked at Gwenevere, but she did not respond. She was looking down, and, perhaps, did not know that she was appealed to.

"Has Gwenevere not asked for your services?" he said; "but I suppose she knew she could reckon on them. You have been like sisters all your lives, so you are the natural person to be her bridesmaid. Can you have a dress ready by Wednesday? but I know you can, for this is the second time that you have been wanted in this capacity at a very short notice."

"Do not count upon me," said Emily, her colour

rising. "You all know what I think of this matter, and I will have nothing to do with it."

"Oh, Emily; do not be so unkind!" cried Gwenevere.

"Suppose we say no more about it at present?" said Lady Le Mesurier. "Perhaps Emily will recover her temper before Wednesday; and if not, in a private wedding as this will be, a bridesmaid can be dispensed with. Really, Emily, I must say that you surprise me."

"I hope I may be forgiven for saying just one word," said Colonel Atheling. "A young lady's freak of temper may be of no great consequence, but I wish it to be distinctly understood, that I will not have Gwenevere worried. The haste which my appointment necessitates is very trying to her, and she has quite enough to bear. I will not permit *any one* to annoy her." And there was no doubt about the frown now.

"Harold," said Emily, "you make a mistake when you use that tone to me. You do not frighten me in the least. If you all wish me to return to Silverton at once, nothing would please me better: and your threat can only mean that."

"I have used no threat."

"Well, your words seemed to imply one. Do you all wish me to go?"

"Oh, Emily, don't leave me," cried Gwenevere,

bursting into tears. "Promise me that you will stay."

Harold looked displeased.

"Gwenevere," said he, "pray control yourself. Do not give your Cousin any reason to believe that you regret the step you have taken."

"But she does—she *must* regret it?" said Emily. "Gwen cannot be so changed in so short a time. Gwennie, take courage and tell them that you have come to yourself."

Lady Le Mesurier looked nervous, but Harold only smiled. Gwenevere glanced at him, and then looked down hastily. But in reply to Emily she said nothing.

"Will you answer your Cousin, my dear; or shall I speak for you?" said he.

"Speak for me; you know what I would say," she whispered.

"Then, Emily, once for all let me speak, and have done with a painful subject. Gwenevere had begun to repent of her rash promise to this Mr. Vincent before I gave her any reason to think that I admired her. My father, the head of her family, and Lady Le Mesurier, her guardian, cordially approve of her conduct in every respect, except in having made such a promise to such a person. My affection and admiration for her are strong enough to enable me to overlook what I cannot but regret,

but if I were out of the question, Gwenevere would put an end to this childish entanglement all the same. If you persist in your refusal, you can effect nothing, but to betray to the world what she, very naturally, wishes concealed. Now, do not answer me hastily : take a few hours to think it over ; and then, if you still refuse her request, we must contrive to exist under the weight of your displeasure. But in any case, let us have no scenes."

"And as to your returning to Silverton," added my Lady, "that is out of the question. It would be very wrong to permit it. Your conduct, at present, does not raise my opinion of Mrs. Darnell's educational system, for really such displays of temper are very rare in well-bred girls. In fact, I wonder if I am justified in leaving the little Winthorp girl with her."

But Emily Fane, with all her gentleness, was not a girl to be "sat upon" with impunity. This combined attack gave her back her spirit, which fretting over Gwenevere had rather subdued ; and in reply to her Aunt she laughed a little.

"You can do as you like about the child, Aunt Gundred ; but if she is taken from Mrs. Darnell, I have no more to say to her. But I must ask you all not to talk so much about my horrid temper. Those who know me, know that I have not a very bad temper ; and in this case, what I say is prompted

by principle and truth—not by temper ; for I am far too sorry to be angry. I am very, very sorry for all concerned—but for Gwenevere most of all ; but, thinking over what you have said, Harold, I will be her bridesmaid, if you and she still wish it. I don't want to add to the difficulties of the path she has chosen."

Gwenevere looked greatly relieved.

"I do, indeed, wish it," she said. "I could not have any one else. It would look so odd."

"Have you ever worn that pale blue silk with the lace trimmings?" inquired Lady Le Mesurier ; "for if not, it would do nicely for this occasion, and, really, the three maids will have quite enough to do to get Gwenevere's things ready in time. Though, of course, we got nearly everything in London."

"I have never worn it," answered Emily.

Dresses and trunks were now discussed, and Colonel Atheling produced a box, which he gave to Gwenevere. It contained some very beautiful jewels, which had belonged to his mother. Gwenevere brightened up, and talked more than usual. Emily watched her narrowly, and came to the conclusion that she was acting of her own free will ; which she would gladly have doubted, if she could. In the course of the day she asked her for those unlucky photographs, as she wished to put them safely away.

"I burned them," said Gwenevere. "I did it before I went to Saxelby; on the day you left home, I think. They looked so common, Emily; and I was ashamed."

"So am I," remarked Emily, curtly; and Gwenevere did not ask for an explanation. They saw but little of each other, for Gwenevere was in great request for "trying on," and Colonel Atheling wanted her whenever he was in the house. She looked as beautiful, and more animated, than of old; thin, perhaps, but in good health: yet somehow, not like herself—not like the Gwenevere of Silverton. Emily fancied that she was a little afraid of Harold; but plainly, she was as much devoted to him as she had ever been to Hugh.

Emily was very unhappy. In all this bustle, she was very lonely, and the disappointment in Gwenevere was a terrible shock to her. On Sunday she was the only member of the family who wished to go to church, and as that was the case, she declined the carriage, and walked into Fairminster with Patty. When the service was over, she longed sorely to go to the Deanery for a little sympathy, but she would not indulge herself, as she felt unwilling to tell her friends there the real cause of her sorrow. So she turned towards home and walked fast, in hopes of avoiding Mrs. Appleby; however, in this she did not succeed, for

she was presently pounced upon, and regularly catechized.

"Was she to be bridesmaid? Why didn't she like the match? Was it only the suddenness of it, or did she dislike Colonel Atheling? Was the wedding to be very early? And might not an old friend like the speaker venture to be in the Cathedral, even though it was to be strictly private?" And just as Emily was at her wits' end, she found Sir Clarence Le Mesurier by her side, and heard him say in his most leisurely way—

"My dear lady, I am to be the best man. And I give you leave to be in the Cathedral, knowing that you mean to be there, whether I give you leave or not. Wedding at 10 a.m. sharp.—Miss Fane, may I walk with you? I am actually faint with hunger; come on."

Emily moved on, feeling decidedly grateful for the rescue.

"But I thought it was to be at eight," she said, when they were safely off.

"So it is. That was a pious fraud. Showed great presence of mind, too."

"For shame!" said Emily, who could not help laughing. "What a dreadful fib!"

"Shall I go back and set her right?" asked Sir Clarence; but he was by no means prepared for the answer.

"Yes, do so ; and I will wait for you here."

"Are you serious?" he said, looking down at her.

"Yes! Don't you think it will be better? You know—it is *not* right, Sir Clarence."

"Do you never tell white fibs?" he asked.

"I never *mean* to say what is not true ; but as I am very incautious, I may sometimes do it by mistake. Are you not going back?"

"No, I am not, Miss Fane. First, because I know that Atheling will fall upon me if I have that creature there ; secondly, because I don't think one more little fib will matter very much."

They walked on, Sir Clarence in deep meditation. "Even allowing that it might sometimes be inconvenient," thought he, "what a pleasure it would be to know that every word your wife said was exactly true." Having meditated thus, he said—

"If I were to ask questions like that very undesirable female, I expect you would snub me."

"It is not impossible," answered Emily, trying to speak lightly.

"I am going to risk it."

"You are a brave man, then. Perhaps you don't know that I have a very bad temper?"

"Is *that* perfectly true?" he asked.

"I think not," she said; "but I have been accused of it lately."

"Take my chance," said he, nodding. "Miss Fane, why do you dislike this marriage so much?"

"Who told you that I dislike it?"

"Yourself. You are quite changed. Look as sad as—anything. I know you don't like it. Tell me why? Now you are going to do it,—to snub me, I mean."

"No; I don't think I have spirit enough left to snub any one. But I am not going to answer your question."

"Do you dislike Atheling, or is it only that you are sorry to lose Miss Gwenevere? You might tell a fellow that much."

"No, not even that much."

He looked down at her as they walked along, side by side, and presently said—

"Suppose a fellow knows already?"

Emily started. "I do not think that likely," she said.

"It is not likely: but the queer thing is, it is true. It's generally the unlikely things that are true. I was telling my Aunt yesterday that Atheling had said something to me about you—that you were angry and unreasonable with Miss Atheling; and she said that I was to tell no one else, but that you had a reason—that some one else

whom you are fond of liked Miss Atheling, and that you are a warm friend."

"Aunt Gundred told you this! How very odd! She seemed so angry with me."

"There is a good deal of seeming about my Aunt. But, is this true?"

"Sir Clarence, I am not going to discuss Gwenevere's conduct with you," she answered. "I cannot imagine why Aunt Gundred told you even so much, and I hope you will keep it quite secret."

"Don't be alarmed," said he shortly; "I am not likely to talk of it."

They finished their walk in dignified silence, for Sir Clarence was vexed. But the more he thought of it, the more satisfied he was that she had been quite right in her refusal to speak out. And being much more interested in her than in either Gwenevere or Harold, he was content.

Monday passed uneventfully, save for Harold's departure. He went to London, to return to Fairminster on Tuesday night; but they would meet again only in the Cathedral. On Tuesday, Lady Le Mesurier drove into Fairminster to ask the Dean to perform the ceremony next day: as they wished no one to be there but their own party, this step had been put off to the last moment. Emily declined to go with her, and was alone in the little sitting-room, so soon to be only hers: Gwenevere

being in her own room. Emily was painting—putting some finishing touches to "Faith and Reason," and thinking sadly how her faith in human truth and love had been rudely shaken, when she heard a hasty step, and some one made a vain effort to open the door of Gwenevere's room. She called out, "It is locked!" and then the key was turned and Gwenevere came hurriedly in.

"Emily—what shall I do? Aunt Gundred is out, and—Hugh is here."

"Here?" exclaimed Emily, letting her brush fall.

"Yes, I have just been sent for. What *can* I do? Carberry sent up his name, and says he asked for me: he is in the drawing-room. Oh, Emily, what am I to do?"

"Go down to him," said Emily, taking her hand. "Oh, Gwen, go down, and see if his voice will not wake you from your dream of pride and folly. Good, true, faithful Hugh—he has come to give you one last chance, in spite of your insulting conduct. Oh, Gwen, thank God for it, and go down."

"No, I will *not*!" she answered, almost violently. "I promised not to see him, and if I did, it would do no good. You will not believe me that I don't care for him, but it is true. I would not marry him now for anything you could give me. It would only pain him and agitate me."

"Then what do you mean to do? I'm not going to say another word, Gwennie. I suppose in time I shall learn to know that my dear sister Gwen is dead and buried, and that this heartless fine lady is all I have instead. But you need not fear my horrible temper any more—I give you up."

"I do wonder how you can speak so unkindly. You might feel a little for me. You seem to think that I have had nothing to suffer. But I must not begin to talk about this. The question is, what are we to do now?"

"Send him word that he must wait until Aunt Gundred comes back."

"But she may bring Mrs. Appleby with her, and then it will get talked about,—and Harold will be angry."

"Then, perhaps, you had better see him."

"I will not! Emily, go to him, and beg of him to go away quietly."

"And break his true heart without making a fuss about it: on no account disturb my Lady Clara Vere de Vere's composure! Gwenevere, you are—but I said I should say no more. Yes, I will go down and see my old friend, Hugh Vincent; not to spare your feelings, but to save him from Aunt Gundred's highbred insolence if I can."

She threw aside her painting apron as she spoke, and left the room. Not giving herself time to lose

courage, she ran downstairs and opened the drawing-room door. Hugh, who was standing in the middle of the room, came forward quickly—faltered, and stopped.

"Yes, it is only me," Emily said.

"Emily, will she see me?"

"She will not. Hugh, you are a brave man, and now you want all your courage. Call it up, and listen to me patiently. I don't know how they managed it—they sent me away, you know,—but they have changed her altogether. The Gwenevere we all loved, either never lived, or is dead. I have said and done all I could. If you saw her now it would do no more good than I did."

"I cannot think so."

"It is hard to believe, yet it is true. And she will not see you. I tried to make her in vain. You have no choice about that, she will not come down. You can insist on waiting until my Aunt comes home, but she may bring friends with her, and Gwenevere begs you to go, because if you wait you may be seen, and then people will talk."

"Gwenevere said that!" cried poor Hugh, looking as if she had struck him.

"She said it more plainly than I have. I am cruel, Hugh, but it is a kind cruelty. If you stay here, it is only to be politely insulted."

"But, you know, she *cannot* be in earnest. She

cannot expect me to give her up to this man without a word."

"She would bid you remember that there was no engagement. And I am telling you nothing but the simple truth—which it cost me bitter pain to learn: her only feeling about you, is a fear that Harold Atheling may be angry if her engagement to you is talked about. It is shameful—but it is true."

Hugh walked over to the end of the room, and stood gazing into the fire. She followed him.

"Listen to me, Hugh. You and I were like brother and sister—let me speak now, as to a brother. If, this moment, Gwenevere were free again, and willing to marry you, would you marry her, after this? If I were a man, I should scorn to do it: a girl who seemed to love you so dearly—and in six months is ashamed to remember that she ever loved you, and that for no better reason than that your birth is not equal to hers; a girl who—I am ashamed to say it—seems as fond of Harold now as ever she seemed of you! Now, I ask you, Hugh Vincent, soldier and gentleman—would you marry her, knowing all this?"

* Hugh looked full at her.

"Emily, on your honour, is this true?"

"It is true. You know it is when I say it."

"Yes; I know that. You are right, Emily; you have touched the right chord. You have been

a real friend to me. No, I would not. I may not be able to forget her, for I am a fool, I believe; but I would not marry her now if I could. How could I trust her?"

"That is what I feel myself. Now go, my dear old friend, before any one comes in. You are too true a gentleman to risk injuring her. Good-bye, Hugh; good-bye."

He took from his pocket a little parcel of letters and put them into her hand; then, without a word, he went away. Emily sat where he left her, wishing to be calm before she went back to Gwenevere. She heard a carriage, and presently her Aunt came into the room alone.

"Emily," she said, "Carberry tells me that Mr. Vincent has been here?"

"Yes. He is gone."

"But what on earth brought him? It was very bad taste, for I am sure the letters were decided enough."

"Those low people are so terribly in earnest sometimes. He found it hard to believe that Gwenevere had never been in earnest at all."

"Did she see him? I ought to have provided against this. But who would imagine that he could come, after my letter?"

"She refused to see him. She sent me down to get rid of him."

"It was quite the best way, as I was so unfortunately out of the way. I hope, dear, that he behaved tolerably?"

"Quite tolerably. I explained to him how matters stood, and he agreed with me that he would not care now to renew the engagement. So he did not insist upon seeing her, and he will not trouble her again."

"After to-morrow he will find it difficult to trouble her," said Lady Le Mesurier, loftily.

"What! You think Harold would prove quite patient and affectionate if, for instance, Hugh sent him these letters, Gwenevere's, which he gave to me?"

"Emily, take them upstairs and burn them, I beseech you," said Lady Le Mesurier, in a far more natural and less dignified manner. "I suspect that poor Gwenevere, who is rather a sentimental damsel, may have written more strongly than she felt, just at first; and even you must feel that there is nothing to be gained by agitating her now."

"Nothing. Nothing to be gained by it. But I must have her leave to burn them. I do not see any use in keeping them. Poor Gwenevere! Her only chance of happiness now is to forget Hugh and keep Harold in good temper. But it is a very slender chance, Aunt Gundred, and if it fails, we

who have loved her so long will feel that you have a good deal to answer for."

"Emily, you forget yourself strangely when you speak in this manner to me."

"No, Aunt Gundred, I do not indeed. I am not going to say anything disrespectful, but it is better that you should know exactly what I think and feel on this matter. It is your doing—yours and Harold's; for Gwenevere is weak, and therefore less to blame than you are. You have led her to do it, and now what do you expect in the future? You have taught *her* that the most solemn promises can be broken; and *him*, that she is a weak and changeable woman. What trust can she have in his honour, when he has persuaded her to act dishonourably? What trust can he have in her love and truth, when he has seen her cast both to the winds? And without Honour, Love, and Truth, what happiness do you expect?"

"My dear child," said Lady Le Mesurier, uneasily, "believe me, you are taking a very—a very overstrained view of a very common event. Gwenevere is very young, and her first silly fancy faded away when she had seen more of the world; that is the common-sense view of it."

"Well, perhaps so. I will hope that you are right. But I have one other word to say: Aunt Gundred, I am not a second Gwenevere."

"What do you mean?" asked Lady Le Mesurier; and the question showed that Emily's words had made her more uneasy than she cared to show, for had she had her senses about her, she would never have said that.

"I mean that I shall not change my mind. It may be a want of common sense; but I hope never to blush for myself as I blush for Gwennie."

"I am not aware that you have been tempted to change as yet; and, of course, my only wish is that you should do nothing rashly. Change is possible, as you may see for yourself; and the very fact that Gwenever has changed, makes me more determined not to let you act hastily."

"I do not want to do so. For Claud's sake I am content to wait. No one shall say that he held me to a rash promise, or hurried me for fear I should forget him. Now I had better go to Gwenever."

She expected to find Gwenever anxious and alarmed; but she was quite composed, having sent Hortense to find out whether Mr. Vincent had left the house or not.

"What delayed you so long?" said she.

"Aunt Gundred delayed me. Look; Hugh gave me this parcel of your letters. Aunt Gundred wishes them to be burnt."

"Oh, yes; burn them, please."

Emily took the poker and made a red glowing hole in the fire, into which she put the letters, and watched them until they were thoroughly burned.

"There, Gwennie; they are gone, and, with them--what?"

"The last memorial of a folly that I am ashamed of," answered Gwenevere, quickly.

"Oh, Gwennie, Gwennie, when Mammie used to teach us in the happy old days that the world is an enemy to be fought against, and that it had conquered many who began well, I used to wonder what it meant; but I know now."

"Emily, I could not help it! I could not help being ashamed; I really did try. The day you went to Castle Dering, after I had burned those pictures, I began to see what my feelings really meant. I was writing to Hugh, and I thought I would bid him meet me at Buxton the next day; that I would escape and go back. I felt that if I went to Saxelby, the change would surely come. I tried to write the words; even after my letter was gone I still tried to make up my mind: I couldn't do it. But I did try."

"But, did you pray, Gwenevere? Did you confess that you felt this sore temptation and ask to be kept?"

Gwenevere looked startled.

"It—it was not a sin. I could not help changing.



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I was changed then, only I did not know it for certain."

"Dear Gwen, don't think me unkind, but how can you say that it was not a sin?"

"Would you have me marry Hugh when I do not care for him?"

"No, but I would have had you remember that a solemn promise is as an oath to a Christian woman, and struggle from the first against these feelings of false shame and—— But there is no use now in arguing the matter. What you have done, can never be undone. But do you not care to hear anything about Hugh?"

"I have promised never to speak about him when I can avoid it."

Emily thought that this, being a convenient promise, had a chance of being kept, and then scolded herself for the thought. But she said no more. The old Gwenevere was gone, and she had not yet learned the way to the new Gwenevere's heart—if she had one. She sighed deeply, and went back to her painting.





CHAPTER XIII.

EMILY ALONE.

THE house was astir early the next day, but it did not matter to Emily, who had been quite unable to sleep. Sorrow for Hugh, and for the disappointment she knew Mrs. Darnell must feel ; grief at parting with Gwenevere, to whom her warm heart still clung ; fears for her future happiness ;—all these feelings disturbed her “light heart,” and made her restless and sleepless. She was very glad when Patty entered her room in the grey dawn, and said that it was time to get up. She dressed quickly in her pretty blue silk, a little white bonnet completed her costume, and was by no means in her way,—though if we saw that bonnet now, I suppose we should call it enormous. Patty was not at all satisfied when she was dressed. Blue was not particularly becoming to Emily, who had not much

colour at any time, and to-day was pale and heavy-eyed, with no brightness in her little face.

"Miss Emily dear, you look so wisht," the girl said.

"S6 what, Patty? It does not sound complimentary."

"It's a word I learned from my old grandmother, ma'am. She was from Ireland, you know. Do try, Miss, to eat some breakfast, and maybe the hot tea will bring a little life into you. But indeed it's no wonder. Oh, Miss Emily, but it's the queer wedding."

"It is very unpleasant having it so early," Emily answered. And Patty perceived that she was not to make remarks. She thought this hard, for she had abstained from all talk with her fellow-servants, even refusing to discuss Hugh's sudden appearance, which of course she understood well enough; and she thought that Emily might have rewarded her by saying what her own feelings were. However, Emily never did, either then or afterwards. Her pale face and heavy eyes alone witnessed against Gwenevere—her loyal tongue was silent. It was only half-past seven when the carriage came to the door. Emily was just ready, having in vain tried to eat the breakfast Patty brought her. Gwenevere was ready. The servants crowded into the hall to see the bride, and a beautiful and queenly bride she

looked as she came down the broad dark stairs, her white garments and gossamer veil setting off her beauty to the best advantage. Her cheeks were a little flushed, her blue eyes brilliant, the sun made a glory of her golden hair as she stepped into the carriage. Lady Le Mesurier in mauve velvet looked truly magnificent—poor little Emily was effaced between them. But if we really have, as some believe, each a Guardian Angel who follows our earthly course with tender interest, of the three bright beings whose charges were on their way to Fairminster Cathedral that keen March morning, which do you suppose bore the serenest brow?

Colonel Atheling and Sir Clarence met them at the Cathedral door, and soon the small party stood in their places, and the ceremony began. All went well until the Dean made the usual inquiry, "Who giveth this woman to be married to this man?" when there was an awkward pause. The verger was standing at the door, too far off to hear. Sir Clarence was gazing so earnestly at Emily (under the impression that she was going to faint) that he might just as well have been at the door too, and no provision had been made for this part of the business. However, Lady Le Mesurier was equal to the occasion. "I do," said she in a clear voice. The Dean hesitated for a moment, but then

went on with the service. I hope that when our good Queen in after years gave away one of her daughters, she was pleased to know that Lady Le Mesurier had set her this example.

When they all turned to leave the altar, Emily was aware of a sudden unexpected pause, and some confusion, but she could not make out what caused it, and it was over in a moment. Much signing of books ensued, and soon they were on their way back to Moor'side, Sir Clarence in the carriage with his Aunt and Emily.

"Miss Fane, did you remark that wickedness prospered. She was not there. I hope she goes at ten—fine long wait for the ordinary service. Meditation good for the old soul."

But Emily had enough to do to keep from crying, and made no answer. Breakfast was ready when they arrived, and Sir Clarence, at least, proved that early rising did not injure his appetite. He and Lady Le Mesurier kept up a very forced conversation. Harold looked displeased, Gwenevere sat in dead silence, and even Emily's tongue was still. The Bride and Bridegroom were to go to Saxelby, there to remain for the few days they could spare before embarking for India. When Gwenevere went to change her dress, Emily went with her, but the servants kept up such a bustle and confusion that she felt confused and dizzy,

and stood by in silence. Fanchette was going with Mrs. Atheling. Hortense, her duty done, returned to her own mistress. At last, Emily, whose eyes *would* fill with tears, stole away to the sitting-room and sat down miserably by the fire. She had sat there for some little time when a hand was laid upon her shoulder, and, looking up, she saw Gwenevere beside her. And it was the real Gwenevere—the gentle Gwen of Silverton, pale, agitated, trembling—clinging to her when she rose to meet her,—Emily's sister once more.

"Emily, don't cry. Oh, forgive me. I've been cross and unkind, but you *will* forgive me? I have but a moment to speak to you. But, Emily, did you see him?"

"See him; what do you mean?"

"Hugh. He was in the Cathedral. When I turned round to go away—I saw him. He was close to the organ. I think he meant to be quite hidden, but I saw him. Our eyes met."

"Yes," said Emily, hardly knowing what to say.

"And I saw what I have done. It came like a blow upon me. I saw his face, and I knew what it meant. He loves me still, but he despises me. Oh, Emily, he despises me! It came upon me then. I had only thought of Harold before."

"I am sorry," said Emily. "He ought not to have been there."

"Oh, Emily! too late, too late!" cried Gwenevere.

"My dear Gwen, I beseech you listen to me. Calm yourself; take care what you do. You must not dwell on this—you will forget it; you will love Harold and think only of him. You must not think of what has happened to-day; if you have been weak, ask now for strength, and do what is right."

"I will try; but I have been forgetting everything good. I wish I had not seen Hugh. I am afraid Harold saw him too."

Fanchette knocked at the door and came in.

"Madame, the carriage is at the door, and Monsieur le Colonel waits."

Gwenevere would have lingered, but Emily put her arm round her, and led her downstairs. Colonel Atheling and Lady Le Mesurier were in the hall. Harold came forward, and said to Emily—

"You must forgive me, Emily, but I quite forgot to give you this. I meant to have done so at breakfast. A little memorial of the day. Come, Gwenevere, say good-bye bravely. I wish it were not for so long an absence, but we shall meet again—all of us, I trust. Good-bye, Emily; good-bye, my dear Aunt."

Gwenevere kissed them with cold lips, and in silence. She was almost in the carriage when she seemed suddenly to lose her self-command. She pulled her hand away from Harold's, and flew

back to Emily, to whom she clung with all her strength.

"Emily! oh, what have I done!—what have I done!"

"Gwenevere, hush! my darling; think of what you are doing now," whispered Emily. "Here, Harold, take her; forgive us both, and remember we've been sisters all our lives, and were never parted before. Good-bye, Gwen; God keep and bless you."

The last Emily saw of the newly married couple was Harold's face, with a frown upon his brow which made her fear that he understood what had passed only too well. She turned and ran up to her own room, crying bitterly.

It was some time before she could collect her ideas sufficiently to change her dress and think of employing herself. She was so shaken by all the agitation she had gone through, that she felt almost ill. At last she stood up and looked at herself in the tall cheval glass: such a crumpled affair as the unfortunate blue silk was, and her pretty bonnet looked "like one of Mrs. Appleby's," said she to herself. "I will not ring for Patty; I would rather not have to talk. What is this?" as she found that she held a small hard substance in her hand, Harold's present. "'A memorial of the day,'" she murmured: "I am not likely to forget the day.

Oh, I wish I could ! My poor Gwen ! my beautiful, gentle Gwennie ! I should grieve less if you were dead, Gwennie ; if this were your funeral instead of your wedding-day. I can see no chance of happiness for you ; and Harold is *not* good, I know he isn't."

She opened her dressing-box and thrust the handsome ring into a drawer ; then lifting the little old turquoise ring which she wore to her chain, she kissed it, saying aloud, "My *good* Claud," in a tone of such full trust and satisfaction that it was wonderful to hear. "Only eleven o'clock !" she exclaimed, "and already it has seemed a long day I shall write to Mammie." She sat down to the writing-table to do so ; and there, with her face on the blotter, Patty found her at two o'clock, fast asleep.

For many days Emily was low and depressed. She was lonely, and very anxious for Gwenever. But soon, Gwenever and her husband sailed for India, and Sir Clarence, who saw them in London, told her that Mrs. Atheling looked remarkably well, and as jolly as a sand-boy ; that Harold seemed awfully proud and fond of her, and that both were in tip-top spirits. It was such a comfort to Emily to hear this, that she quite forgot Sir Clarence's mendacious propensities, and believed him implicitly ; whereas, if the truth must be told, he had not

noticed how either of them looked, but, perceiving her anxiety, said what he thought would relieve it. Some men never think it necessary to tell the truth to a woman ; yet if you called them untruthful they would be wonderfully indignant. Gwenevere wrote pretty regularly, but her letters were not much more than a chronicle of passing events ; still, as she made no complaint, Emily hoped she was happy. Youth and health began to assert themselves, and she regained a fair amount of cheerfulness, and began to enjoy her life again pretty well. Lady Le Mesurier did not openly interfere with her pursuits in the morning, and Sir Clarence was careful not to startle her by his attentions. She was such a bright little creature, and made the house so pleasant, that "my Lady" was very gracious to her. So it was a pleasant time, but also a very dangerous one. While Gwenevere was there, Emily had had a sense of alarm for her, which had prevented her from being too much fascinated by the life they shared. She was in far more danger now. Then, Harold had rather tried to keep her in the background, and Lady Le Mesurier, anxious for his success with Gwenevere, had seconded him. Now, being the only young lady in the house, no longer eclipsed by Gwenevere's beauty or by her exquisite singing, and with Sir Clarence watching every opportunity of pleasing her—now

indeed it remained to be seen if Emily were made of better stuff than poor Gwennie. She would not have been human had it been no temptation to her—not to forget Claud, for that never entered her head, but to be very completely spoiled for the position of a clergyman's wife. Lady Le Mesurier was a clever woman; she never opposed the girl. Emily went to the Cathedral, visited Miss Spratt and Rosa Eustace—her Aunt never objected. The library, taking up about an hour every Friday, often made her late for luncheon; Lady Le Mesurier never complained of the delay. But as the summer wore on, the Eustaces observed, with regret, though not with surprise, that Emily ceased to be regular at Morning Service; that Miss Spratt, though not forgotten, for flowers and fruit were often sent to her, was seldom cheered by a visit; and Rosa hardly ever saw her friend. Mrs. Eustace mentioned these things to her husband, and asked him if he would not give Emily a hint.

"When she is here, do you remark any difference in her?" said the Dean.

"Not the least! She is just the same."

"I see no change myself," replied the Dean. "To attend daily service is not actually necessary, though very pleasant when one lives as near the Church as we do. I think it would hardly be judicious to say anything to Emily about it. I

don't like so gay a life for any girl, but it is not her fault. I could hardly speak without casting blame upon Lady Le Mesurier, which I would prefer not to do. Let us wait a little, and see how things go."

Things went gaily and smoothly. The summer went by, and seemed to have passed like a bright dream. Monday was the Archery day at Castle Dering—a gay gathering, with a dance in the evening; Tuesday, the Choral Union met; Wednesday, the Amateur Sketching Society; Thursday, Lady Le Mesurier was "at home;" Friday and Saturday, paying visits; evening engagements pretty often. Was it any wonder if Claud's weekly letter was the only thing that never was neglected? It never was; he never had cause given him for a doubt or a fear. When summer was over, Lady Le Mesurier took advantage of having caught a heavy cold, to whisk her charge off to France. She would not take her to London, because she could not forbid her to see Claud, but she wished to give her a taste for variety. So the Winter was spent travelling about in France and Italy; the Spring found them in Paris; and it was now the first of June, and "my Lady" had returned to Moorside. By her advice Sir Clarence had not followed them to Italy, but he had joined them in Paris, and brought them home.

The Dean and Mrs. Eustace were sitting in their

pleasant long room, Rosa on her couch, and Sophy going in and out, robbing the rose-trees and filling the vases, when Mrs. Appleby was announced. Rosa disliked Mrs. Appleby particularly, but Emily had made her promise to see all who called unless she were really ill.

"Well, my dear Dean! here you are, busy as usual. Writing sermons, no doubt. Great tax on a man's brain to write so many. Dean Appleby generally preached Tillotson's, and then, when he *did* write one, he shut himself up in his study (the little room where your poor Tom used to paint), and put his whole mind to it. That was how he came to be such a really solid preacher! Miss Rosa has quite a colour to-day. I hope it isn't hectic, I'm sure! Have you heard the news?"

"Mrs. Appleby, how can we tell that till we know what news you mean? Public, or private?"

"It will interest all Fairminster, at all events. Lady Le Mesurier came home last night."

"I heard she was on her way," said Mrs. Eustace. "Rosa will be glad to see Miss Fane again."

"Really? I didn't understand from Emily that they were such friends as that! That is not all the news I have to tell you. I had a letter from dear Gundred just before they left Paris, and I gather—she does not directly say, you know—that an event which I foresaw long ago will soon take

place. *If* Miss Rosa really is so fond of Emily Fane, she'll be glad, as it will keep her in the neighbourhood."

"What is it, Mrs. Appleby?" cried Rosa, letting fall her needle in her anxiety.

"Sir Clarence Le Mesurier, of course!" said Mrs. Appleby, triumphantly. "I am so glad. Dear Sir Clarence, he always was a favourite of mine, and I think that dear little Emily so suited to him."

No one spoke. Mrs. Appleby looked sharply round, saying, "You don't seem surprised! did you know it before?"

"No, we had not heard it," said the Dean.

"Oh, then, you know, or fancy you know, some just cause or impediment," said Mrs. Appleby; "not Mr. Frank, I hope? for it is certainly true! She has got her trousseau in Paris."

"Frank? what has he to do with it?" said Mrs. Eustace.

"You think there is some one else?" went on Mrs. Appleby, with exceeding shrewdness expressed in her voice; "but, my dear Dean, old-fashioned constancy is quite gone out of the world."

"Which is supposed to be inconstant in this case," inquired the Dean—"the lady, or the gentleman?"

"I don't say it of either of them, only you all seemed to think—and I know that Emily considers you her Father confessor."

"I do not go as far as confession, as you are aware ; and I know no secret of Miss Fane's, if she has any, which I think doubtful. No doubt we shall see her soon."

"Not at all likely," promptly replied the Animated No, "she'll have something else to do. I am on my way to Moorside ; can I take a message for you ?"

"Thank you, no. I have nothing particular to say," answered Rosa, to whom this had been addressed.

"Mr. Dean, walk with me to the steps, and through the covered way ; I am going that way to save time, and really sometimes the boys are so impudent."

This the Dean did, and had but just returned when, with a magnificent dash, a carriage came to the door, and next moment Emily Fane flew into the room, and into the midst of Rosa's shawls without delay. Sophy screamed with joy, and rushed in, flinging all her roses on the grass ; Mrs. Eustace—"My dear child, how glad we are to see you !" while the Dean stood watching poor Rosa's face, his heart rejoiced to see the look of delight upon it.

"It is worth while to be away, to be welcomed like this," said Emily, as soon as she could speak.

"We hardly expected to see you so soon."

"It is all because Aunt Gundred is in a rage with the gardeners. Only fancy, the garden hasn't a thing in it except the roses; and she says there is no reason for it, and they say it was a hard winter. And to-morrow, you know, people will be coming; and so my Aunt drove in to see Mr. M'Knight at the Nursery, and get something to fill her beds, and crush poor old Fox. She is to call for me."

"People coming to-morrow?" said the Dean; "yes, to be sure, to-morrow is Thursday. And so the round begins again, little Emily."

She looked up at him—not surprised, but questioning; he smiled and said—

"You are not our first visitor this morning. Mrs. Appleby has been here, and left us to go to Moorside."

"She will see the carriage going back to M'Knight's."

"Very likely. But, Mary, I hope you are taking a lesson in dress," said the Dean to his wife. "Unless my eyes deceive me, this is a Parisian garment."

Emily laughed, got up and turned round and round that Rosa might admire her dress.

"Think of the Dean knowing the difference!" said she. "My clothes were fairly ruined by the constant packing and unpacking; so, as we were actually in Paris, and I had a great deal to do for Gwenie, I got things for myself too. Look at my bonnet, please; it is only a bonnet to us, but it is a work of art to the maker thereof. Aunt Gundred took me to the place. I expected to see a woman; not at all—a grave man in black, who might be—why he might be a Dean, even! He studied my appearance, talked to me, and at last announced that he saw what my style ought to be. He made me two bonnets, a hat, and some wreaths; and when we went for them he pointed out to me this, slightly peaked look,—do you observe it?—like Mary Stuart's cap; and said, in a tone of real feeling, 'Miss Fane ought never to wear anything without some approach to this form. It is her style.' I really felt quite awed, for the moment."

"Only for the moment?" said Rosa.

"Afterwards I could not help laughing. But I am wasting my time dreadfully, and I want a serious talk with you. I have been longing for it."

"With me, my dear, or with the Dean?" said Mrs. Eustace.

"With both; and Rosa will not mind. You

may depart, Miss Sophy; but get your mother to bring you to Moorside to-morrow, for I have brought you a present from Paris, and it will be unpacked by that time."

Sophy kissed her, and ran back to her roses.

"I want advice," began Emily, seating herself on the edge of Rosa's sofa, "and you know you promised to give it to me. You said just now, 'And so the round begins again;' but that is just what I don't want, and won't have. It was pleasant enough; but I have been considering, and I don't mean to fall into the same useless ways again. Yet what can I do? That is what I want you to tell me."

"Then Mrs. Appleby's news is *not* true," said Rosa, quickly.

"What news?" asked Emily.

Rosa looked at her mother and hesitated to answer.

"I think I ought not to have said that," said she.

"But tell me what you mean, Rosa. I have not the least idea."

"Then," said Mrs. Eustace, "it certainly was a mistake, and we had better say no more about it. Don't you think so, Theodore?"

"Yes; don't ask us, Emily. It would be better to let it alone. She made some mistake, I suppose."

"Well, if you don't mean to tell me, you ought not to have roused my curiosity."

"Quite true. Very wrong of Rosa, and I shall punish her when you are gone. If you want my advice, lose no more time."

"I do want it. I have had such nice quiet times while we were travelling about; I have never had time to think before since we left home—Silverton, I mean, you know. I cannot ask Mrs. Darnell's advice, because it might do her harm with Aunt Gundred. Do you remember, Dean Eustace, that I once very nearly told you a secret? Rosa knows when. So you will understand why I don't want to become a mere fine lady."

"You must be more explicit, my dear. I do not follow your meaning. To begin with, I think no woman ought to be content to be a mere fine lady."

"Of course; but there are many things which would do no harm to one who meant to live always with Aunt Gundred—things not wrong, and very pleasant, and yet things that I should be very sorry to get so fond of that to give them up would be a great sacrifice to me."

"What do you mean when you say, 'one who meant to live always with Aunt Gundred'?"

"One who would be always rich and in good

society. Now,"—blushing rosy red,—“when I marry I shall not be rich, comparatively.”

“You’ve made up your mind that the lucky man is to be poor?” said the Dean.

“He is a clergyman,” she answered simply, “and has very little.”

“What, Madam? Sailing under false colours all this time?”

“Indeed I have not! Aunt Gundred knew it all along, and I think you knew too.”

“I had my suspicions, and so had Rosa. But young ladies change their minds sometimes, and so we did not feel sure——”

“Ah, you never met Claud!” Emily answered. “You read the ‘Blind Martyr,’ I know; have you seen the new one, ‘The Modern Dives’?”

“I have. Your Claud hits hard, sometimes. It is a fine poem. Well were it for England if she would lay it to heart.”

“And do you know he is becoming a great Preacher? I always thought he would. Mr. Darnell was in London the other day, and he wrote me word that the Church is always full when Claud is to preach; and he is asked to go here and there to preach for Charities. Claud is so clever, and so good.”

“My dear child,” said Mrs. Eustace, kissing her. “However good he may be, he is a lucky man.”

“Only because I love him so ; I am not worthy of him in any other way. But I don't want to make myself more unworthy of him than nature made me. I want to be fit to be his wife—to be able to help him, and understand him. And if I turn myself into a mere butterfly until I am twenty-three, I shall be quite useless. I am only twenty-one now, you know.”

“You are not of age until then ?”

“No, no ; I am of age. A lawyer met us in France and put my affairs into my own hands, and Aunt Gundred is not my guardian now. But she can forbid me to marry until I am twenty-three.”

“But do you think she will do so ?”

“She will not allow me to marry Claud. She has told me so since I came of age. You see, when we first came to Fairminster we were both determined to keep our promises. Do not ask me any questions except about myself, but I must make you understand. Gwenevere soon changed. And of course this makes Aunt Gundred hope that I may do the same. She says she would not be justified in allowing me to do so foolish a thing.”

“Yes ; I see what she is at well enough,” said Dean Eustace, looking at his wife.

“I don't see that she is at anything,” Emily

answered ; " but I want to show her that I am quite in earnest when I say that my mind is made up ; and I don't feel bound any longer to consider whether she is pleased or not, further than is reasonable."

" You mean to live with her until you marry ? "

" Yes. She showed me some letters from my father to her, which prove that he wished it ; and it is better, too, in every way, for she would never willingly let me go."

" But you said she is not your guardian any longer ? "

" About money matters, she is not. But I was left to her care, you know."

" Well, my dear, I will give you all the help and countenance that I can. I think you have proved that you know your own mind, and perhaps Lady Le Mesurier may be persuaded to think so too. My advice to you is to give up a fixed portion of your time to some definite work. Suppose you visit among my poor people ? I will make a list for you. If you were to give up two days in the week, one to these visits and one to help Mrs. Eustace in her Dorcas work, which has been too much for her since Mary left us, I think that would be enough."

" I will do as you advise me ; but I fear my Aunt will refuse her consent to the visiting."

"I will come to Moorside to-morrow with Mrs. Eustace and Sophy, and speak to Lady Le Mesurier myself. I dare say I can manage it."

"Oh, thank you, thank you! You really are a good friend to me. And I always taught in the Sunday school at home. May I come in, in time for it here? I could walk in with Patty."

"Very well, and that will be enough. For you don't want to defy your Aunt, only to prove to her that you mean what you say."

"Exactly. She desired me never to tell any one about Claud, but you may say that I have told you. That will show her that I don't mean to be too obedient. Oh, Mrs. Eustace, am I very ungrateful? She is so kind to me, and yet all the time I feel like a fly in a cobweb."

"Never mind, my dear, she cannot exactly eat you up bodily. How is Mrs. Atheling? Have you heard lately from her?"

"Yes; she is very well; she wanted heaps of things from Paris. She says her baby is very healthy, and the prettiest baby she ever saw. Here comes my Aunt, and the Animated No! Well, there is comfort in that; I shall not have to tell her of my plans if Mrs. Appleby is there all the evening."

"Emily, come again soon, and sing for me," said Rosa.

Emily promised, and ran off



CHAPTER XIV.

MINSTERTVIEW.

THE next day was fortunately fine ; and equally fortunate was it, in Emily's opinion, that the fatigues of the previous day had so overcome her Aunt that she sent word not to wait breakfast for her, as she would not come downstairs until noon ; so that even if Emily had meant to speak to her about her plans, she could not have done so. They did not meet until the Castle Dering carriage was at the door, bringing both sisters to welcome their friend home. Lady Constance was staying with her family, and seemed delighted to see her bridesmaid again. Presently other people arrived, among them the Eustaces.

"Why, Dean Eustace, is this really you?" exclaimed Lady Le Mesurier. "It is seldom that you honour me by a visit!"

"It is not often that you leave home for such a time," replied the Dean; "besides, to be honest, I want to talk to you presently."

She looked first at him and then at Emily, who blushed, of course, because one always *does* blush when it is specially inconvenient. Her Aunt at once concluded that the Dean was about to tell her that one of his sons wished to pay his addresses to Miss Fane, "and that," thought she, "will be a very great bore; and if she has changed her mind, and not for my poor Clarence, I shall positively hate her."

Presently the young people went out into the garden (where the terrified gardeners had worked wonders since the morning) and played croquet. The afternoon passed pleasantly enough; and it was getting late before the Dean came out and told Emily he wanted to speak to her. They walked up and down a quiet walk some way from the croquet ground.

"Well, my dear, I have said my say to your Aunt. I don't know what she suspected me of, but my first words evidently relieved her much. I told her that you had asked me yesterday if I could give you anything to do among the poor, as you were unwilling to live a life of mere amusement, and besides wished, for private reasons, to acquaint yourself with the details of parish work;

and that I should be very glad of your help, so we hoped that she had no objection. She said no, certainly not ; only you must not endanger her household by visiting sick people ; which I promised you should not do. I said I should talk to you and arrange what you should undertake, and she warned me, with a laugh, "not to trust too much to your help, as young ladies' sudden desires for good works were not always to be depended upon." I only said that you wanted to make arrangements now, before your time was filled up with other engagements. She said no more. I fancy she feels uncertain whether you have told me about your engagement, and does not care to make me speak out. So now, Emily, you have her leave to do as you like, only I warn you that there will be a constant quiet endeavour to make your new engagements irksome to you."

"I dare say, but I hope I may be able to avoid any serious difference."

"You will need tact, and, to begin with, never allow your engagements to inconvenience her. I hate to see people keeping every one waiting for them, for *any* reason ; it is really unfair and very trying to the temper."

"I will try. Aunt Gundred enjoys the Castle Dering day—Monday ; but I need not join the Choral Union again, she never went there with

me. Tuesday will answer you for my visiting day, I hope?"

"Quite well. And Friday afternoon is the Dorcas day: you can come to us early; see to the Library, which Miss Sophy has got into nice confusion for you; come to us for luncheon and stay for the Dorcas. You will be at home by five o'clock."

"And I may go to the Sunday school? and that is enough. Thank you, Dean Eustace. You have helped me very much indeed."

"The rest depends upon yourself. Do not depend upon your own strength; and remember, it were better not to begin, than to begin and fail."

"I will remember. Claud will be so pleased," she added with a smile.

"Claud has wonderful patience," said the Dean. "Does he never complain?"

"We are determined that no one shall say a word against him. If I had remained as I was, we must have waited until he got something better than his present curacy—and so we try to be patient. Only it really is hard never to see each other."

"Why does he not come to see you?"

"Aunt Gundred would be rude to him—not rude, I don't mean, but—you know. Besides, she

would say he wanted to hold me to it. No, we must just have patience," she concluded with a sigh.

Mrs. Appleby remained to dinner at Moorside again that evening. She and dear Gundred had a great deal to say to each other, many things to discuss and small plans to be taken up again. So it was not until breakfast time the next day, that Emily had an opportunity of talking to her Aunt alone. Letters were brought to them: one for Emily from Claud; one for Lady Le Mesurier from one of her step-daughters, who wished to come to Moorside for change of air.

"Poor Cora! we must try to cheer her up a little. She has wretched health, and has lost so many children—five, I think: she has none left, poor thing."

"How very sad!" said Emily. "Does Mr. Maunsell come with her?"

"Yes, but I think he will not stay long."

"There will be little use in bringing her here for a short time," Emily remarked. "Not worth the fatigue of the journey, one would think."

"Cora will stay—stay as long as she can, I suspect."

"Why? Is she not happy at home?"

"Happy? oh, yes; but you know her health is bad, and he is a man who cannot get on

without society, and as she has neither health nor spirits for entertaining, I fancy he is very little at home. Lives a good deal at his Club."

"Poor thing!" said Emily, with her eyes on Claud's letter. Could she imagine Claud living at his Club because she was ill and sorrowful?

"I don't think Cora is exactly an object of pity," said Lady Le Mesurier, laughing. "Mr. Maunsell is a man of position, and very wealthy; he made magnificent settlements on her—quite magnificent. But he is an elderly man, and of course does not like to be put out of his way."

"When does she come?" asked Emily.

"I shall write at once, and I am sure she will lose no time. Are you going into Fairminster to-day? I must send a message to Dalton,—I positively must have fish every day while Mr. Maunsell stays. Tell Dalton, Emily. No matter how hard it is to get, I must have it. I always say," she added laughing, "that I secured Mr. Maunsell for Cora by always having fish when no one else in the neighbourhood had it, and I must not lose his esteem now."

"I will tell Dalton. If there is only a sprat to be had, you must have it."

"Anything, my dear, from a sprat to a whale so long as it is a fish."

"But you know, Aunt Gundred, my latest studies

in natural history revealed to me that a whale is *not* a fish, so that won't do."

"Not a fish, child! what is it, then? I am certain that when I was a baby, I was taught that a whale is the largest fish."

"It is not a fish any longer. It's a huge animal with fins. No, has it fins? I *know* it has no scales, its blood is hot, and either it has fins or it hasn't,—all of which proves that it is *not* a fish."

"Very instructive," said Lady Le Mesurier, gravely, "and lucid. Quite in Clarence's style. Talking of him—do you wish to learn to ride?"

"I *can* ride:—a donkey. I often have done so."

"But a horse? Clarence was talking about it yesterday. He has a horse which carries a lady very nicely, and he would lend it to you, and teach you, if you like. He is coming to luncheon to-day to talk it over with you."

"I am sorry, but he can't do that to-day. I have promised to help Mrs. Eustace every Friday with her Dorcas, and so I shall not come home to luncheon. But will you tell Sir Clarence that I should not care to learn. I shall not have time for it, and I am too short-sighted to be anything but a terrible coward."

"Are you to be Dorcased every Friday?" inquired "my Lady," with the least touch of amusement in her voice.

"Dorcased every Friday, visitationed every Tuesday, and Sunday-schooled every Sunday," answered Emily, gaily.

"Poor little thing! It's a bad attack; but you will soon give it up, I dare say. Tuesday, did you say? That is the Choral meeting day. You used to enjoy that. I think you are giving up rather too much for your new craze, do you know?"

"It is not a new craze. I wanted to begin when we first came to Fairminster, but thought it better to wait a little. And then we were away, you know."

"Oh, I know, my dear. You are not the first girl^h I have watched through a fit of the 'Sister of Mercy' fever. I don't mean to interfere, as I told our dear good meddling Dean. Do not forget my message to Dalton, that is all."

Sir Clarence arrived at two o'clock, full of the new idea,—*his* idea, as he fondly believed it to be—which it was not, being, indeed, a little counter-mine of my Lady's designing. He was desperately disgusted at Emily's absence, and still more so when he heard that she did not care to ride. In fact, he looked so crestfallen that his Aunt laughed at him.

"You foolish fellow," she said, "she may change her mind; and even if she does not, it surely is of no consequence."

"But it is! If she cared for me she would have said yes."

"I don't know that. Emily is very reserved."

"Does not impress me with that idea."

"I do not mean exactly that she is reticent, but it does not follow that she does not like your society, because she gives you but little reason to think so. Besides, she has a new notion in her head just now : she is to visit the poor and enact the Sister of Charity. She is going to give up the Choral Union."

"Oh, nonsense!" cried the young man, dismally, "the Sketching Club will come next, I suppose. I say, Aunt Gundred, don't let her, you know. It's too bad, depriving a fellow of his innocent recreation. I shall take to drinking, if she does ; tell her so."

"Tell her so yourself! But she has said nothing about giving *that* up yet. I have not seen your gardens for years, Clarence, and Emily has never seen Minsterview. We will drive over to-morrow ; it will be a pleasure for her. Yes, ride home now and give your orders ; have all the rooms opened. I suppose you don't use them."

"No ; only the study and breakfast-room. They are so big."

"Well, now have the whole suite opened. Have tea, and fruit, and ices ready in the blue boudoir. Take us all over the house. By the way, get the Derings to come too. I will drive over in the afternoon."

He looked very glum.

"Well, you silly boy, what is it now? I expected you to jump at my offer."

"Aunt Gundred, Emily Fane is not the girl to be tempted by a fine house; and if she was, she would not be the girl for me."

"I am aware of that, and you do her no more than justice; but you asked me yesterday what you can do to make her aware that you still admire her, and this would be a very good way. What more natural than that you should wish to show her your home, where you wish her to consent to spend the rest of her life? I think the time has come for you to make your liking for her more manifest, both to her and to the world in general; but not obtrusively so. Don't frighten her, for Emily is, in some ways, the shyest creature I ever knew."

"I dare say it would be a good plan," he cried, brightening up. "How is she to know what a fellow is thinking of, you know? I will ride round by Castle Dering. Thank you, Aunt Gundred. The fruit is very fine this year, and the gardens nearly blind me, they are so bright. I'll rouse old Dickens about the house, or I'll know why; it shall look like itself for once. Don't fail to come; be there by three."

"Half-past. Tell the Dering girls that they

will meet Emily and me, and no one else. And, Clarence; be cautious, or you may—— He's off, poor fellow! I never expected to see him so much in earnest about anything. I must not have my poor Clarence disappointed."

So, when Emily came home, she was informed that "Sir Clarence had asked Lady Le Mesurier to come over to speak to old Dickens, his house-keeper, about something; and he will have the Castle Dering party to meet us. Minsterview is such a pretty old place, and you have never seen it. There is a yew hedge there which, I believe, is five yards thick."

Emily made no objection. But then she did not see the contents of a little note which her Aunt sent to Mrs. Appleby.

"Dear Janet,—Do not come to see me to-morrow, for we shall be out all day. Clarence insists upon having our opinion concerning the rooms, etc., at Minsterview, and we shall drive over there to spend the day.—Yours, G. Le M——."

Now, as Saturday was always "my Lady's" day for paying visits, it was not likely that Mrs. Appleby would choose that day for going to Moorside. Therefore she at once understood her friend's real meaning, and told every one she met that "dear Lady Le Mesurier had taken Emily Fane to spend a long day at Minsterview; she

supposed, to see what furniture she would like ordered for the rooms there ; and *that* looked like business, didn't it ?" Among other people, she said this to Mrs. Eustace.

Minsterview was really a beautiful place, and kept in beautiful order. If Sir Clarence preferred to live in three rooms, and to be so little at home that his servants had nearly nothing to do, he was very particular about the gardens and grounds, which were always in first-rate order. Mrs. Dickens and her maidens had been hard at work since six in the morning, getting the great suite of drawing-rooms into their proper condition—a magnificent set of rooms they certainly were. The Castle Dering people arrived first, and were still standing on the steps admiring the view—the spire of the Cathedral tower marking where Fairminster lay,—when the carriage, containing Lady Le Mesurier and Emily, drove up. Sir Clarence left off in the middle of a sentence, deserting them without ceremony, and went to meet the new comers with a face so expressive of delight, that Lady Constance looked at her sister meaningly.

"This becomes interesting," said she. "Things are evidently coming to a crisis. Poor Dering, he will have to wear the willow ; but what a delicious neighbour you will gain !"

"Dering does not care," said the younger sister,

quickly. Emily came running up the steps at that moment.

"How glad I am to see you here ; I was afraid you would be engaged, and Sir Clarence tells me he has any quantity of peaches for us. Nôw, if I have a weakness, it is for peaches ; do you share it ?"

"Truly I do, and so does Frances. As to my unlucky husband, only fancy, Emily, he never eats fruit."

"*Poor* man," said Emily, feelingly ; "but then, you know, there is the more for you : I think it is rather a good arrangement. Oh, what a pretty hall ! Come on, Frances ; Aunt Gundred has to give the housekeeper a lecture, I fancy. Let us go on a voyage of discovery while she catches her victim."

"What a room for a waltz !" exclaimed Lady Frances, who having, until now, been very silent, suddenly seemed to get into a very flighty state of mind. "What a shame of Sir Clarence never to give us a dance ! Never mind, there's a good time coming. Constance, lift up your voice in melody ; hum a waltz, if you love me. Come, Emily, one turn."

She seized upon Emily suddenly, and when Sir Clarence and his Aunt reached the room, they found the two girls dancing with much spirit to the music of Lady Constance's singing and her husband's whistling (in quite a different key). They stopped

short and laughed gaily : it was long since those deserted rooms had echoed to such merry sounds.

"Frances, on the subject of dancing, you are a perfect maniac," said Emily ; "and it is quite too hot for such violent proceedings. Where are those peaches, Sir Clarence ?"

"Emily, on the subject of peaches, you are worse than a maniac," retorted Lady Frances ; "all the same, where *are* the peaches. Have we been lured hither on false pretences ?"

"You might let a fellow get in a word," remarked Sir Clarence, mournfully. "If you like, you may eat peaches from this moment until you go away. But tea won't be ready until five o'clock ; will you come and see the gardens and things, and we'll gather peaches for ourselves in the houses."

"Oh, delightful ! come along. Fancy being turned loose among a houseful of peaches ! Mr. Haughton, I do pity you so much," cried Emily. "I hope you are good-natured, and like to see other people enjoying themselves."

It was a long, long time before the gardener at Minsterview forgot or forgave that descent upon his forcing-houses ! Emily would have enjoyed the fun and mischief thoroughly, but for one thing : she was puzzled by her friends' manner. Why did they ask her leave to do this or that, when she was but a visitor there like themselves ? And afterwards,

when they went over the house, she found herself almost alone with Sir Clarence several times, and he looked so provokingly pleased. He had been so well tutored by Lady Le Mesurier, that for a long time Emily had ceased to suspect him of liking her more than was convenient. She was very glad when it was time to go home. As they were getting into the carriage, her Aunt said—

"Emily, you didn't see the yew hedge after all. Clarence, take her round that way, and meet me at the white gate; don't delay, for my horses are rather fresh."

"No, no; I am tired, and I dislike yew hedges particularly," said Emily, springing into the carriage. Sir Clarence was left alone, to wonder whether the day had brought him good or evil.

Next day, Mrs. Eustace met Emily as the Sunday school broke up, and said to her, "Walk with me to our house, for I must go back to see Rosa before service, and I want to tell you something."

"What is it, Mrs. Eustace?"

"I think you ought to know it. Do you remember the day you came to see us first? Rosa let slip some words about a report that Mrs. Appleby had repeated to us."

"I do; and you would not tell me what it was."

"I will tell you now, though, for she said something of the same kind again yesterday, and I mean to put you on your guard."

"Then I know what it is!" cried Emily.

"About you and Sir Clarence? yes, it was. She said you had got your trousseau in Paris. And yesterday she told me that you and your Aunt were gone to Minsterview to decide about rooms and furniture, and she said, 'That tells its own story, does it not?' I said there was some mistake, I fancied."

"There surely is a great mistake. Long ago I fancied—something; but I hoped it was all over. Thank you, Mrs. Eustace. I must take care."

The more Emily reflected, the more certain she became that there was a plot against her. She was by nature unsuspicious, but shrewd enough, and now remembered many things which confirmed her in this idea. How had any one known in Fairminster, before her return, that she had been buying an unusual quantity of new things in Paris? How had any one known beforehand of the visit to Minsterview? In both instances the report had been spread by Mrs. Appleby, who must know that in each instance the story was more than half invention. Now Mrs. Appleby was, as Emily knew, only a tool in the hands of Lady Le Mesurier, whose object Emily fancied she could understand. To draw her on quietly until she could say to her, "You have encouraged him so long that all the world believes you to be engaged to him, and

for very shame's sake you must not throw him over now." This was the plan, and she, not unnaturally, gave Sir Clarence credit for being one of the plotters, remembering Harold Atheling's conduct. After grave consideration, Emily came to a resolution, and after luncheon she shut herself up in her room to carry it out. She wrote to Claud Beresford—the first letter she had written to him out of her usual course since she left Silverton.

"MY DEAR CLAUD,

"You will be surprised at hearing from me to-day, but not sorry, I hope ; and if you begin by being surprised, what will you be when I have said my say ? You know I am legally of age now. When Aunt Gundred brought us here, she said there was to be no engagement between you and me ; it was only a matter of words, for no one could alter facts. I felt bound to obey her till I was of age ; you know in one particular I must obey her for two years longer, but I am sure I may now act, to some extent, for myself. And I should like to have the protection of an avowed engagement. I do not mean to be treated as poor Gwen was. Write to me, asking me to renew our formal engagement, and I will put on my dear little old ring again. I have it safe, and have never worn a ring since I had to take that off ; if I might not wear it, I would

wear none. Do not delay, Sir, unless you are tired of me—nay, even in that case do not delay either, for one would like to know.

“Your affectionate

“EMILY FANE.”

Monday afternoon was spent at Castle Dering, where archery was still the rage. But Emily spent the time with the dear old lady; and Sir Clarence, who had brought with him a beautiful bracelet to be the prize of the best archer, feeling pretty sure that Emily would win it, had the pleasure of seeing it won by that tall Miss Douglas, whom he detested.

“Emily, child,” said old Lady Marlinton, when they were alone, “do you know what Constance says of you?”

“I shall know soon, because you will be kind, and tell me.”

“Is it true, little girl? I warned you it was possible, if you remember. Are you glad that I kept your secret? Not even Frances knows why you ran away from us that time.”

“Dear Lady Marlinton, it is not true. I am of the same mind still, and I am not going to let this be said of me any more.”

“How can you prevent it?”

“Ah, that is my secret! You shall soon hear.”

"Well, I won't ask questions. Do you know that your dear Aunt has never forgiven me for letting you go to the Eustaces? When I tried to explain to her, she smiled sweetly, and said, 'Not a word, dear Lady Marlinton. I can *quite* sympathize in your feelings,' and she glanced in the direction of poor Frances, who happened to pass the window."

"And what did she mean?" asked Emily, colouring a little.

"That I had a design upon Sir Clarence for Fan, I suppose. She won't be beaten without a fight, little Emily."

"Then we must fight," said Emily, laughing. "But I hope better things. She has been kind to me, and I should be sorry to offend her."

"If you succeed you'll deserve a medal! You're a constant little mortal. How's the Poet?"

"Well, and writing another book. Have you seen his second? I will bring it to you next Monday."

"Do so, and tell me how you prosper in your warfare," cried the old lady, her face wrinkling up into a malicious smile as she thought of her dear Gundred—defeated!



CHAPTER XV.

EMILY PUTS ON HER RING AGAIN.

IT was Wednesday morning before Emily received an answer to her letter. Meantime she avoided Sir Clarence so pointedly, that Lady Le Mesurier was quite displeased, but she kept silence, having seen the letter to Claud on Sunday, and being rather afraid to drive her niece to extremities. She was, therefore, not quite unprepared when Emily looked up from her letter (which, contrary to her habit, she had opened at once), and said—

“Aunt Gundred, I have heard from Claud.”

“Yes,” said my Lady, in her most “my ladyish” tone.

“May I read you his letter?”

“Well, I am rather hurried this morning; and you know that I disapprove of this correspondence.”

“I will tell you what he says in my own words

if you prefer it. You know I am twenty-one, Aunt Gundred."

"Yes, of course I know it."

Emily was blushing furiously, but went on with a kind of gentle persistence, which evidently would not be turned from its object.

"I know that I may not marry without your consent until I am twenty-three. But as I am of age, I do not think it will be wrong of me to renew my engagement with Claud, which you made me break off when I came to you."

"Indeed, my dear, considering that you have never ceased to correspond with him, I do not see what difference it can make whether you call yourself engaged or not."

"It will make this difference," said Emily, steadily. "No one else will pay attention to a girl who is engaged, so that an open engagement must be a great comfort. Then you do not object? I am very much obliged to you, Aunt Gundred."

"I cannot prevent it; but I do not approve. It is my deliberate opinion that you are acting very foolishly, and Mr. Beresford very selfishly; and I trust that if you do renew this absurd engagement, you will, at least, not make it known."

"Do not ask that. I have never even felt tempted to change my mind. To me personally

the engagement can make no difference, be it secret or avowed ; but I have been told by two or three people that I am engaged, or going to be, to some one else ; and I want to put an end to that."

"To my poor Clarence, I suppose? Indeed, he is much fonder of you than you at all deserve, you foolish child. I wish, for your own sake, that you would take time to think. You will throw away this brilliant marriage, make Clarence miserable, and surprise every one ; and, in the end, you may find that you have done it for a mere romantic notion. After living among people of your own rank, you will never marry this obscure Curate."

"You forget that I lived among *his* people until I was nineteen, and was far happier than I have been since. And I cannot have him called an obscure Curate, you know. A man who at eight and twenty is known both as a Poet and a Preacher, may be poor, but cannot be called obscure. I am as proud of Claud as I am fond of him."

"What has become of Mr. Hughes—was that his name?—the young man to whom Gwenevere had been engaged?"

"Hugh Vincent? He was very ill after that visit he paid here, and they say he must never go out to India again. Then it came out that his elder brother wished to emigrate—he was married and has a large family, and his wife's people had gone

to Canada. So his father gave him a large sum of money, and Hugh is to be his heir now."

"Poor Gwen! what an escape she had! Fancy that lovely creature a farmer's wife!"

"You speak," said Emily, laughing, "as if Mr. Vincent were a farmer in the same way as the Pottses, where you get your butter. But then you have never seen Meadowlands. It is as old a place as Minsterview, and, in a different style, quite as fine. The Vincent of Queen Elizabeth's time was knighted—he fought in Howard's ship against the Armada."

"The photographs of the Miss Vincents do not give one the idea of ladies," said Lady Le Mesurier, coldly.

"Ah! how often shall I have to repent of that trick of mine! They are plain girls, and they dress badly; but, indeed, Aunt Gundred," proceeded Emily, nettled into reprisals, "they look far more ladylike than Mrs. Appleby."

"Oh, Mrs. Appleby!" repeated Lady Le Mesurier, turning over some letters.

"Aunt Gundred," cried Emily, with sudden gentleness, "don't let us make each other angry. You are so kind to me that I hate to vex you, and yet I cannot allow my life to be spoiled by my own folly."

As she spoke she drew an insignificant-looking

little ring from her dress, detached it from the chain, and put it on.

"This was my engagement ring, and now it returns to its post."

"Such a wretched little trumpery affair," said my Lady: the battle was going against her indeed when she was reduced to use such a weapon as this! "Do, my dear, wear a handsome ring to hide it."

"I haven't a ring in the world but this, and one Harold gave me—and I hate the very sight of that."

"Yet Gwenevere's marriage has turned out very well," said Lady Le Mesurier, gravely, "in spite of your doleful prophecies. She seems perfectly happy, if one may judge from her letters."

"She seems to lead a very gay life, you mean. You don't know Gwen as well as I do."

Emily retired to her own room, intending to paint, but her hand was so unsteady, and her mind so unsettled, that she could do nothing. Yet, if she had only known it, she had utterly discomfited her foe. Lady Le Mesurier had not dared to accuse her of having trifled with Clarence's affections, which was what she had always hoped to be able to do. By her simple straightforwardness Emily had given her no possible ground for that, or any other accusation, except that she was foolish and determined on making a bad match.

Mr. and Mrs. Maunsell arrived in the evening, and the very next day Sir Clarence appeared at Moorside—to his Cousin's great surprise, as on former occasions she had not found him in such haste to pay his respects. Being observant, she soon perceived how matters stood with him, and was pleased, having taken a fancy to Emily. Being left alone with Sir Clarence, she spoke of the girl, praising her for her pleasant, genial manner, "so cheerful, and yet so gentle," she said.

"Didn't take long to find it out, did you?" was all the reply she could elicit. He was puzzled, not knowing how to account for the fact that Emily had avoided him of late. He came again the next day, but finding that Emily was in Fairminster, he unblushingly asserted that he had business there too!

"There is no use in asking you to stay," said his Aunt, "for Cora and I are going to drive. Mr. Maunsell has gone to visit the old Bishop, and Emily will not be home until dinner-time: this is Mrs. Eustace's day, for her Dorcas society."

"It is too bad!" he exclaimed, irritably; "what does that old woman mean by asking Miss Fane to spend her time in such doings? One never can see her now."

Lady Le Mesurier was silent. Mrs. Maunsell laughed, and said—

"It is a very good turn for a girl to have, Clarence. Miss Fane will make an excellent Lady Bountiful when she marries. Have you any idea when that will be, my good Cousin?"

"It may be to-morrow, if she likes," he answered, frankly. Mrs. Maunsell actually sat upright to stare at him.

"Clarence! I *really* don't know you!"

"Dare say not. Never saw me in earnest before."

"What a lucky girl she is," cried his Cousin.

"I don't know that," he said, "but if I get her I shall be a lucky man. But I don't know—sometimes I think—— Good-bye, ladies, I'm off; for Cora is opening her mouth to assure me that no girl in her senses would refuse me—and that is just what I don't believe, and don't wish to believe. I suppose, Aunt Gundred, that old woman will spare Miss Fane for Monday?"

"I think we shall be at Castle Dering," she answered, and he departed.

"It will be very pleasant for you, Mamma," said Mrs. Maunsell, after some consideration.

"What will be pleasant, my dear?"

"Having Emily Fane settled so near you. Clarence is evidently quite in earnest."

"He has admired her from the first. But Emily is a strange girl—full of romance and folly, and I cannot advise him to——"

"Oh! no girl could be so perverse," exclaimed Mrs. Maunsell, in a tone of conviction, sinking back wearily upon her pillows. Poor soul! she had, with the utmost docility, married (at five and twenty) a man of nearly sixty, and now at five and thirty she was sinking into the miserable life of a confirmed invalid, whose ailments are more than half fancy, without having enjoyed during her married life one hour of real happiness. And yet, so strong a hold does the World maintain upon its votaries, that she was quite ready to call Emily perverse and idiotic, if she hesitated to secure "magnificent settlements" by marrying a man she did not care for.

On the Monday, they all went to Castle Dering, rather early, that Mrs. Maunsell might see her friends there before the rest of the world arrived. She "hoped that dear Lady Marlinton would see her." The old lady had left off appearing during the early part of the entertainment. Lady Frances said she would go and see. Emily rose, saying—

"Let me go with you, Frances. I want so much to see your Grandmother."

"Come, then; we'll leave poor Con to do the civilities for a few minutes." Then, as they went upstairs together, she said, in a whisper—

"When is it to be, you little Emily?"

"When is what to be? Who dragged who about

the walls of where?" said Emily. But her blush was enough for her companion.

"How truly sedate and innocent! My dear, Gran is longing to catechize you. We have been telling her it is, and she says it isn't, and nothing will make her hear reason about it."

"Are you sure, dear, that that is altogether her fault? for if you are not more explicit to her than to me, she is really to be pitied. You might as well speak Greek."

"If this was not the door of Gran's room, and if Gran wasn't sharp of hearing and short of patience, I should have great pleasure in shaking you well, Miss Fane.—Here is Emily, Gran, dear; and Mrs. Maunsell wants to know if you will see her?"

"Cora Maunsell? Certainly not, love. She was always a tiresome creature, and now she never has an idea beyond the state of her own digestion. Tell her anything you like, dear, but don't let her near me. I shan't come down to-day at all; we must have them to dinner some day, and I shall see enough of her then. Ask them for Thursday, Fan. Well, little maid. How goes the world with you?"

"Very well, Lady Marlington," said Emily, seating herself beside the old lady, and taking off her hat.

"Now, Emily," said Lady Frances, "you are not

to stay with Gran all day ; we want you quite too much, and—— What do I see ? ”

Emily paused in pulling off her gloves, and said, “ Well, what *do* you see ? ” Lady Frances seized her hand, and pointed to the little ring.

“ The engaged finger, Gran ! I hope you are ashamed of your incredulity now. But, Emily, what a—will you forgive me if I say it ?—what a shabby little ring ! Has it a story, to account for its shabbiness ? ”

“ Yes, it has a story ; but it was very cheap, I remember.”

“ You may perceive, Gran, she does not deny— ” Then, seeing a smile pass between them, she said, “ You seem wonderfully amused, both of you. And you are very composed, Emily, for such a blusher as you are.”

“ You see, it is such an old affair. I blushed all my blushes long ago.”

“ What, were you engaged before you went abroad ! I wish you had—I mean, why did you not wear your ring then ? ”

“ Frances, I was engaged before I ever saw you ; and when I first saw you, I was not formally engaged. I had my dear little blue ring, and wore it to my chain, which may account for its shabby appearance. But now I mean to wear it again. I am of age, you know, and—— ”

"But I thought you never met Sir Clarence before you came here?"

"What has he to say to it? I am engaged to Mr. Beresford, the author of the 'Blind Martyr,'" she added, proudly. Lady Marlinton laughed aloud at her granddaughter's amazed look.

"Gran; I do believe you knew it!"

"Yes, my dear, I knew it. She told me just at the time that Constance was married."

"And—and Sir Clarence, Emily,—what does he say to it?" said Lady Frances, slowly.

"He has not spoken to me about it yet, but I am sure he will be kind about it, for he and I are very good friends."

Something in her manner told Lady Frances that this was all she was likely to hear, so, stifling another question, she walked away to the window and stood looking out. Emily and the old lady talked in whispers—the latter laughing like a malicious old fairy. Then the archery-ground began to fill, and the two girls went out. Emily seemed determined to distance all rivals to-day, and attended to her archery and to nothing else, and Sir Clarence looked very much disgusted. On the way home, Mrs. Maunsell remarked that Emily was rather silent, and took it into her head that she might do her Cousin a kindness; so, during the evening, Mr. Maunsell and Lady Le Mesurier being engaged in

a game of chess, she said to Emily—"What were you thinking of as we drove home to-day, Miss Fane? Were you wondering whether you had been *too* cold?"

"No, I was quite warm. I am not at all a chilly person, and even you must have felt warm to-day."

"My dear, you are such a nice girl, and I really like you so much, that I will ask you to forgive me for saying, that really you are a *little* too much given to extremes. I cannot help seeing it—you overdo things. Your coldness to-day, for instance—and just now, pretending to misunderstand me, and——"

"Wait, Mrs. Maunsell; just hear me. I really did misunderstand you, though I see now that I was very stupid. As to the rest, I suppose you have heard a report that Mrs. Appleby has been spreading abroad: and it is not true. Indeed, I think I had better tell you that I am engaged, and was engaged before I came here at all."

"And not to Sir Clarence! You *do* surprise me. But, of course, you are sure that it is a better *parti*. Tell me all about it. Does Mamma know?"

"Yes, she has known it always. It is not a good match, as you mean the word, but it is the best for me, because I know how good he is, and he and I have loved each other all our lives."

"I *am* surprised!" was all that Mrs. Maunsell could

find to say. She certainly was not very bright, but, for all that, she ventured next day to tell Lady Le Mesurier that she thought it was not using Clarence fairly to keep him in the dark about Emily Fane. Lady Le Mesurier declared that she would not interfere. It was not often that my Lady was defeated, and she resembled a French army in one particular—a defeat demoralized her completely. She was out of temper, she actually felt ill, and she did not see how to get out of the scrape with dignity. Presently, while the dispute was still in progress, Sir Clarence arrived to inform his Aunt that he was going to give a ball, of which she must do the honours. He was considerably surprised by the careless way in which this bright idea was received.

"Oh, certainly, Clarence, if you wish it. A ball in summer is a mistake, I think."

"They were saying the other day that I ought to give a dance, don't you remember : and I want to show Miss Fane ——" Lady Le Mesurier rose abruptly, and left the room, saying to Mrs. Maunsell—

"You are right, Cora ; tell him. I will come back again."

She was really fond of Clarence, and dreaded his reproaches. Mrs. Maunsell, who had so lately declared "that he ought to be told, and that she meant to tell him," was frightened out of her few senses now, and would have run away if she could.

"My Lady looks ill," Sir Clarence remarked. "What's wrong? Failed to get fish for Maunsell, is it?"

"No; and Mr. Maunsell goes to town to-morrow. But Mamma is dreadfully vexed, and it is no wonder. I have been advising her to tell you—and that is what she meant when she said 'tell him,' just now: and I am very sure you ought to be told."

"Suppose you tell me, then?" said he, carelessly. "What is it, if it isn't Fish?"

"Fish!" echoed Mrs. Maunsell, quite nettled at his coolness. "Clarence! Emily Fane is engaged to be married—to a clergyman—a curate—a nobody—she was always engaged to him. And now it is an open engagement."

She ended by beginning to cry: she did not dare to look at him. He sat quite silent for what seemed to her a long time. Then he stood up, and said—

"Thank you, Cora," and was walking to the door, when it opened, and his Aunt came in.

"I've told him!" cried Mrs. Maunsell from her sofa.

"Clarence, do not go. I have much to say to you."

"You had better let me go," he said. "I may say—what is better unsaid."

"Indeed I think she seems to have treated him very badly," came from the sofa in Mrs. Maunsell's exasperating whine; "he had no idea of it, not the least idea."

"No!" he said fiercely, "and yet Miss Fane is not to blame. She has never trifled with me. I have always known that she didn't care for me, but I have always hoped she might in time, because—listen, Cora, and blame her no more—because I was assured that she was entirely free. I asked you the plain question, Aunt Gundred, and then I could have got over the whole thing in a week, and you told me distinctly that she was not engaged."

"And she was not, indeed. She had been, and I thought, and still think that it is a foolish piece of romance, so I refused to allow it to continue. But Emily is of age now, and the other day she told me she had renewed her engagement."

"But, as you know very well, had you told me the truth, the whole truth, I should have thought no more of her. Now, it is very different. Aunt Gundred, you led me into this, and you must stand by me." He began to walk about the room in an excited manner. "Emily Fane *must* be my wife. This fellow, whom I suppose she hasn't seen for years, shall not triumph over me. I shall do something desperate. I will shoot the fellow first."

"Clarence, dear Clarence, control yourself. You don't mean a word of it. You don't know what you are saying. I trust to your good feeling, to your sense of what is due to yourself. I only ask you to go home and give yourself time to think."

"You are right," he said more quietly; "I'm talking awful rubbish. Men don't go mad for love in these days, but you, my Lady, have done your best to drive me mad. Why did you not let me go while I had myself in hand? It's all your work from beginning to end. I lay my misery and my ruin at your door, not at hers. She has been kind and true."

"You are ungrateful, Clarence. I have never wished for anything so much as that Emily Fane should be your wife, and this is my reward. But let us say no more; perhaps things may yet turn out better than we think now."

He walked to the door, but the instinct of a gentleman made him pause before he opened it.

"You meant kindly by me, and I am grateful for that. It is not your fault I suppose, that you must be plotting and contriving. I never knew but one woman yet who is simply true, and that is Emily Fane. I tell you both in all earnestness she is not to blame."

"She is a very silly, wrong-headed girl," said

Lady Le Mesurier ; "but, Clarence, believe me, if you can only make her believe how this affects you, you have a chance yet. This cool boy-and-girl affair, which both parties are content to continue as it is for an indefinite time, *must* give way to a man as much in earnest as you are. And you will be saving Emily from a wretched life ; if she ever marries this man it will be a fatal mistake."

"I told you once," said Sir Clarence, "that I would not care to be second to any one, but now I should be only too glad to do it. But let me go home ; when I have thought it over I will come again."

So he left them, to his Aunt's great relief. For she was thoroughly frightened and upset for once in her life.





CHAPTER XVI.

VICTORY !

SIR CLARENCE went home to his beautiful old place, with a heart as heavy as a lump of lead. From a careless liking for Emily, and a perception that she would make a very pleasant wife, he had grown gradually into a real affection for her, warmer than he had given himself credit for being capable of. Brought up in his Uncle's house, watching the manœuvres which were continually going on there, he had never realized that a woman could be simply true and upright until Emily proved it to him. He had watched her now for two years, and had never caught her in the least deceit ; and it was really touching to see how the poor fellow clung to his belief in her goodness in the midst of all his grief. I think he had a feeling that if Emily Fane were proved to be less than he thought her,

it would be a greater blow to him than the knowledge that she would never be his wife; and, somehow, he did know that, in spite of his Aunt's hopeful words. For two or three days no one saw him, but by that time he had come to a determination.

"I'll go to her, and have it out with her. She'll tell me the plain truth—that I know. If there's a chance for me she won't deny it, and if there is not, I would rather know it. It wouldn't be manly to worry the girl, or to set Aunt Gundred plotting against her, if her mind is really made up. I dare say I ought not to bother her at all, for I suspect she insisted upon making her engagement known because I had shown her what I was up to. But I cannot give up without one fight for it; and, if I am wrong, it is all Aunt Gundred's fault."

It was Friday. Emily would be at the Deanery. Sir Clarence rode into the city, left his horse at the Hotel, and walked quietly to the Cathedral Close: where he had not lingered very long when the door of the Deanery opened, and Emily, followed by Patty, came down the steps and crossed the square. She started slightly when she saw him, but greeted him as usual, and talked pleasantly as they walked through the streets. When they reached the country road, Patty fell back to a discreet distance, and Emily became

aware that her companion was not attending to her remarks. While she was wondering what she had better do, he bent his head to take a hurried glance in her face under her shady hat, saying—

"I came to meet you to-day because I have something particular to say to you."

"Yes," said Emily, "and—you have met me."

"Just so. But you know what a stupid fellow I am. I'm so afraid of making you angry by some awkwardness, and then you won't hear me out. Besides, I'm afraid that you think I am never in earnest."

"Well, you so seldom are in earnest that I never feel sure of you. That is quite true."

"Then you must promise me two things. First, to hear me out fairly; and secondly, to believe that I mean every word I'm going to say: only I mean twice as much as I can hope to say. Promise me."

"I promise; but, Sir Clarence—I don't know—have you heard *my* news? Did Aunt Gundred tell you of what she calls my obstinacy?"

"Yes, she told me. But I want that promise all the same."

Emily said no more. It was coming, and it must come. Whatever he had to say, she must let him say it now. He walked along silently for a little while, and then said, with boyish impatience—

"I can't talk with that Patty of yours trotting behind us, and the gate of Moorside in view. Send the girl on, and walk home through the wood. Do, Miss Fane." Then, seeing her colour and hesitate, "I won't keep you long, and I won't vex you."

Emily called to Patty. "You can go on, Patty, and put out my dress ; I will go a little way through the wood."

The said wood was a belt of trees which encircled Moorside, through which there was a pretty pathway. Sir Clarence said no more until they had passed through the gate and entered this path.

"Now," said he, "remember your promises. My Aunt told me on Tuesday that you have been engaged for a long time, and that you wish your engagement to be declared now. If I had known this from the first it would have been well for me."

"But, Sir Clarence——"

"You promised to hear me out, remember. I'm not blaming you,—far from it. Please believe me when I say, once for all, that I know you to be blameless in this matter. I somehow fancied from the first, that you were—not engaged exactly, but that you were not thinking of—I mean you know, that you didn't want—what an ass I am! I wish I could say it plain—that you didn't feel at liberty to receive attention. That's more like it," he added, with an air of relief.

"And you were right."

"Yes. I felt it so much that I asked my Aunt plainly, and she told me a half-truth, which to all intents and purposes might as well have been a lie. So I put away the idea; I thought it was only that you were no flirt and didn't care much about me—and that made me want you all the more. Emily, I love you now with all my heart—I do, indeed. Do you believe me?"

"Very unwillingly, I do," she answered.

"Don't be sorry; come what may, you have done me nothing but good. I am a better man since I knew you, I'm not a good man; but I'm better than I was, and you could make a good man of me, if you—would love me." And he looked anxiously at her.

"Oh, Sir Clarence, is this kind?"

"Yes, it is kind. If you were like most of the girls I have known, I should ask you to remember that I can give you position and money; for, Heaven help me, I would stoop even to that now, to win you: but I know you wouldn't care about that. What I say to you, Emily, is only that I love you—and that so dearly and so truly, that my life will be just a burthen to me without you. So that if you are only holding to your first engagement because you think it your duty, perhaps——"

"No, no! Stop, Sir Clarence. I have heard enough. My Aunt has given you that idea, but it is not true. You don't know Claud Beresford, or you would never think that the woman he has loved would forget him. Dear Clarence," she added gently, "I am almost glad you have spoken, because I was afraid that you would blame me. Thinking that you had quite ceased to think of me in *that* way, I have been very friendly, and others have said that I encouraged you. But if you felt that I did not mean that, I am at ease; so I am very grateful to you."

"So I have no chance?"

"None—not the least," she answered firmly.

"Well, give me one little bit of comfort if you can. If you had been free—if you had never met Mr. Beresford—— What, not even then?"

"I think not," she said reluctantly.

"Will you tell me why you think so?"

"Oh, Clarence, you will think me unkind! and yet I will tell you why, because when you have got over your liking for me, and ask some other girl to be your wife—and you will, Clarence, and she will love you dearly—then you will be glad that I told you the truth now. I never could have loved one upon whose sincerity I could not depend. I know you would speak truth in great matters always, and to men, on all subjects, but I can't help seeing that

you don't care how you play upon a woman's credulity. And knowing, as I do know, that no one who was trying to be a Christian in daily life as well as in name would play with the truth as you do, I should never have let myself love you—in that way."

He remained silent so long, that she feared she had offended him: but at last he said—

"I knew I should get the plain truth from you. It's curious enough, you know, that it was for your simple truthfulness I first began to like you. What you say of me I cannot deny; but, in excuse, let me say that I have known but one woman who cares enough for truth in her own doings to have a right to be down upon me."

"There are many, however. I could name many to you. But I confess that I have often felt that there are women who do their best to lower the standard of truth and honour. I cannot deny that."

"Well; I have said my say, and got my answer. I know that I might have understood without asking; and I did, but I wanted both to set my mind at rest, and to prevent Aunt Gundred from plotting in my favour. I shall tell her plainly now, that I—have no chance. And good-bye, Emily, for a time. I'll go away for a while, and when I come back, we may be friends, I hope? I will never speak to you again about this, upon my honour;

and I cannot do without your friendship. I must always think you one of the best and noblest of women, and I am thankful I have known you—even now."

Whereupon Emily began to cry, and held out her hand to him. He clasped it closely for one moment, and then turned back along the little path with long strides. Emily ran home and up to her own room, where she cried so heartily and so long that she had a violent headache, and was obliged to go to bed instead of dressing for dinner. That talk with Sir Clarence was the only thing of any importance which found a place in her life, without also finding a place in her letters to Claud.

Sir Clarence wrote to Lady Le Mesurier, telling her plainly that he gave up all idea of winning Emily. He did not reproach her for her conduct, but there were times when she could not help reproaching herself. The effect of this feeling, however, was to make her very angry with Emily, who had defeated her at all points, and whom she believed to be triumphing over her secretly. In this she did the girl a great injustice, as she thought as little about the matter as she could, and was really sorry when she could no longer blind herself to the fact that her Aunt's manner was cold and distant. She hoped it would wear off, and tried not to allow her own manner to be

influenced by it ; but, feeling that she had not deserved it, she did not fret much about it. In fact, she carried a "leal, light heart," as her old song has it.

Sir Clarence went abroad ; met an old friend who had gone wild on the subject of Natural History ; and the next thing that Fairminster had to talk about was that Sir Clarence was in London with this friend, and that they were buying tents, rifles, revolvers, hunting-knives, tinned meats, potted meats, condensed soups, and condensed milk, meaning to plunge into the heart of Africa and be heard of no more for seven years. It was quite a relief when Sir Clarence wrote to his Aunt, confirming part of this marvellous tale, but speaking only of being absent for one year. "Then," said he, "I shall hope to come home again, my dear Aunt, and that we shall be good friends as we always used to be. Forgive and forget what I said in my anger ; you meant all in kindness, and you always were kind to me, and I am not the fellow who has a right to complain that you did not tell me the whole truth." There was an enclosure for Emily, which ran thus :—

"MY DEAR MISS FANE,

"I have met a fellow whom I knew at Oxford. He remained there longer than I did,

being a year younger than I am, and during that last year he knew Mr. Beresford, who had just come up. When we came to London he began to talk to me about him, and persuaded me to go and hear him preach : and afterwards he came to see Hume, so I have met him. So I want to tell you that I do not wonder at your saying that if I knew him, I should know that you were not likely to change. He is a grand fellow—none of your pink and white clergymen who look as if a spot of mud on their black respectabilities would make them ill. I must beg your pardon for my presumption, which I can appreciate better now. I am going to Africa to kill lions ; if, on the contrary, the lions kill me, do not quite forget me. Keep a place in your memory for me until, either in this world or the next, I claim your friendship. And God bless you, Emily Fane, for you are a good woman.

“ Ever truly yours

“ CLARENCE LE MESURIER.”

Aunt and niece were alone, for Mrs. Maunsell had returned to her home in a permanent state of astonishment at Emily's folly. Before her departure she had made herself very unpleasant by openly pitying her, as having made a mistake, of which she must be privately repenting, though she would not show it.

"Has Clarence told you that he really is going to Africa?"

"Yes, but he gives me no particulars, except that he means to hunt lions."

"He is going with Mr. Hume, the naturalist,—a regular wanderer. Clarence will get a taste for it, too; and then farewell to all my hopes for him."

Emily made no reply: so Lady Le Mesurier presently added—

"You have this to answer for."

"No, Aunt Gundred, for I neither deceived nor encouraged him. After the very first, I never thought he cared for me, and I supposed that you had told him I was engaged. Sir Clarence himself does not blame me, and he must know best."

"In that note, does he say nothing of returning if you give him hope?"

"Not a word."

Lady Le Mesurier tried to go on with her needlework as if quite at ease, but her face betrayed so much uneasiness and regret, that Emily felt quite sorry for her. Perhaps, if she made an effort now, the coldness between them might melt away; so she said—

"I am very, very sorry that this has happened."

"You will be yet more sorry, I suspect," answered her aunt, dryly. "If you ever marry this young

man, you will repent it every day you live. You will be almost poor, you will step down from your position in society, and it is impossible but that you should repent it. If that note gives you an opportunity of reconsidering——”

Emily laid the note before her.

“There is nothing here that you may not read,” she said, “and you will see what Sir Clarence thinks of Claud.”

Lady Le Mesurier read the note. She was silent for a minute, and then said, coldly, “I perceive that you have no further chance.”

“I am sorry, Aunt Gundred, that you insist upon taking it in this way,” replied Emily: and there the conversation dropped.

But Emily was soon made to feel her position was no pleasant one. Never before had my Lady been so signally defeated, and although she had much surface good nature, it was only for those with whom she was pleased. Her imperious temper was not often roused, but when roused, it was not a pleasant one, and Emily was fairly astonished at the small ways in which she showed her displeasure. Every day that the girl spent in Fairminster was made the subject of annoyance. Invitations which Emily wished to accept were declined, because there was no use in taking her out, as she was determined to throw herself away; and other

invitations were accepted, simply because Emily did not care to go. Lady Le Mesurier and Mrs. Appleby talked at the delinquent by the hour, which was extremely trying to the temper. The girl's spirits began to give way, as she thought of two years more to be spent in this ungenial atmosphere. She bore it as long as she could, and without complaining, for she would not make Claud uneasy about her, nor would she make matters unpleasant between her Aunt and the Eustaces. But my Lady was to learn yet once more that it was not safe to reckon upon tame submission from Emily Fane. After waiting some time (it was late in October before she made up her mind to act) and honestly trying to soften her Aunt, Emily said to her one evening—

"Aunt Gundred, Mrs. Darnell has asked me very often to go to Silverton for a time, and if you have no objection I should like to go now."

"Certainly not! You must be aware that I cannot permit it. Mrs. Darnell has not sufficient principle to prevent a meeting between you and Mr. Beresford, and that I will not have."

"I hope to meet Claud there—he could be spared for a few days before the Advent services begin. As to want of principle, I do not see why you accuse Mrs. Darnell of that: and, Aunt Gundred, I must ask you to think of my request a little, before you answer me."

"I have answered, I believe."

"Yes; but 'we'll pretend,' as Gwen and I used to say, that you have not; because I hope you will give me a different answer when I have explained things to you. I have not been happy here lately, Aunt Gundred. You are displeased with me, and I think unjustly so; and you have not been kind to me as you used to be. I am very sorry, and would do anything in reason to satisfy you, but though I have tried for a long time, things do not get any better. Now, you know, I am not a child, and I feel quite sure that I am only bound to obey you in one particular: but I don't wish to raise that question. Still, I am sure that you have no right to coerce me, and I hope you will not try to do so. I am very anxious to go to Silverton, and I should like to do so with your consent."

"Yes?" said my Lady, inquiringly.

"So will you think it over and tell me to-morrow? I will not write to Mammie until then."

Lady Le Mesurier made no reply: she was very angry and did not wish to betray it. When she thought about the affair quietly, she came to the conclusion that she had better give her consent. It was not wise to drive this troublesome, plain-spoken girl to rebellion; and, moreover, there was a chance that a temporary return to the old home and the old life might open Emily's eyes

to the fact that the new way was pleasanter and the new home more charming. So next morning she signified to Emily that she would not oppose her desire.

"Oh, thank you—thank you, Aunt Gundred! And when I come back, will you not try to forgive me for what I really could not help? I don't think you know how unhappy you have made me, or you would not do it."

It was impossible to resist the sweet manner and the frank look—Lady Le Mesurier was softened.

"You are a silly child," she said. But it was said more in her old pleasant way.

A long day's shopping ended in so many presents being ready to go with Miss Fane to Buxton, that she was obliged to telegraph to Mr. Darnell that she had an unusual quantity of luggage. It was a joyful little woman who set forth upon that journey.





CHAPTER XVII.

SILVERTON ONCE MORE.

This Tuesday evening, the 25th of October—just two years since Mr. Darnell escorted the two girls to Chester on their way to their new home, and now he stands on the platform at Buxton waiting for a train, and meditating on what the two years have seen. Two young untried girls had left him on that October day—one was returning now. Gwenevere was lost to them—was Emily still their own? This question was secretly tormenting the good man very much. His wife had no fears; but he knew that the test about to be applied was no slight one. Emily was to return from riches to poverty, from society to solitude. Should this last test prove too much for her, he felt that he could not greatly blame her,—she had meant

honestly and had done her best to keep the old affections warm : but if she stood it!—if she came back to them their own loving, single-minded Emily,—then indeed did Mr. Darnell feel that his nephew might say with the husband of Solomon's virtuous woman, "She will do me good and not evil all the days of my life."

Up came the train—the sleepy station awoke all of sudden. The carriage doors were opened, and out of one came a small person in a seal-skin jacket and cap—the seal-skin jacket and cap! the very articles which had gone away two years ago! And under the cap was the same little face—bright, gentle, saucy and appealing all in one,—the very same Emily Fane, unless appearances were more than deceitful. She sprang into his arms, her voice ringing out clear and sweet, "Oh, but it is good to be at home again!" Mr. Darnell dismissed his fears at once. Patty was rescued from the carriage, and they all three spent a busy five minutes in rescuing the various trunks and boxes from the van.

"I have brought a large cart for your luggage, and Maria Vincent's pony carriage for you, my darling. Patty can come with us."

"Come along. Oh, why didn't Mammie come to meet me? I am hungry to see her."

"Mammie declared she couldn't bear to be stared at while crying—and cry she must when

she meets you. We shall not be long in getting home."

"Home! Oh dear," sighed Emily, contentedly. "And when does Claud come? I feel as if I had not seen him for twenty years!"

"Having left us when you were one year old? that is making a long engagement of it, indeed."

"So it is a long engagement. Why, everybody is married except Claud and me,—and Maria Vincent! Why didn't Maria marry John Everard long ago? I always thought she would marry before Bertha, and here she is at home still."

"It is no fault of Everard's. But look, Emily! here is my poor Anne coming along the pathway—such a walk for her to take, the foolish—— Why, Emily! stop, child—sit down again,"—seizing her just in time. "I declare you are as silly as she is. Trying to jump out while we were going so fast."

He said no more, for he perceived that he might just as well hold his tongue, as no one was listening to him. When every one was again in a condition to hear reason, Patty was set down to walk by a well-remembered field path to her mother's cottage, and Emily climbed into the little back seat, leaving the place in front for Mrs. Darnell. "I feel at home here," said she, "as if we had borrowed the carriage for a day's shopping, Mammie, and you and Gwen were in front. Ah! poor Gwen."

"Poor Gwennie," the others said softly. It saddened the rest of the drive, that once beloved name:—nay, still beloved; but with a sad and pitying love—she of whom they once were proud as well as fond.

But Emily was as happy as a child in her old home. Little Ethel Winthorp was a pretty, quiet child, in appearance not unlike what Gwenever had been at that age; she was in a silent trance of delight over a new doll with a trunk full of clothes, and of silent admiration for her new Cousin. Claud was to come on the following Monday, and Emily determined to make good use of the intervening days in seeing all her old friends, so that she might have time to devote herself to him. Patty was sent home to her mother. "It would be so nice to see if she was spoiled, and could not do without a maid," Emily said; at which Patty laughed.

"Mammie, I wonder if any one else ever was as happy as I am!"

"You have every right to be happy, my dear."

"I have a great deal to make me happy—is that what you mean?"

"Not altogether. My little Emily! how unspoiled you are. Your two years of trial have not spoiled or changed you, and not one who loved you has ever had a sore heart by your fault,—that is what I mean."

Emily blushed and glowed very much as she used to do ten years earlier.

"It is so pleasant to be praised," she said; "but I'm afraid there's nothing very wonderful in it Mammie. It is only because poor Gwen frightened you so."

"Ah yes; and grieved me sorely—and surprised me, too. I was blind, I suppose, for I had no idea she was so weak."

"Weak?—yes, that is the right word, Mammie. Gwen meant to do right, and even tried, I do believe. But, you see, I was younger, and both Aunt Gundred and Harold have such strong wills; and I think they were determined she should marry him from the very first."

"I dare say. Well, poor child, I hope she is happy; and surely he will be kind to her. She had such a lovely, gentle temper; and oh, Emily, badly as she behaved, I cannot believe that her religion was all imagination."

"Oh, Mammie, it was sincere, but her mind had no bones in it. I often fear for her; Harold seemed to me exacting and imperious to a degree. Her letters tell me nothing, but I fear she is not happy. And she is dreadfully extravagant. I have never told Aunt Gundred, but I tell you everything, you know. Before she had been out there six months, she wrote to say that she could

not continue to provide for little Ethel, and yet I know she has an immense allowance. But she gets out such quantities of clothes."

"And have you been paying for Ethel all this time?"

"Yes; but you know I can very well afford it. I am saving, Mammie! actually saving, for buying furniture and things; think of that!"

"And so is Claud; all he makes by his writings he lays by. You're a thrifty couple, you two. Here comes Maria Vincent; I see the pony at the gate."

"And not Hugh! Do you think he dreads seeing me, Mammie?"

Mrs. Darnell shook her head. "Poor Hugh!" she said. Emily looked startled; but there was no time for questions, as Maria was at the door. Emily ran out to meet her with such evident delight that Maria began to cry.

"Emily, Emily, why couldn't it have been you that Hugh loved?" she said, dolefully.

"What would Claud say to that?" cried Emily. "But does Hugh still grieve so much over his disappointment?"

"Don't let us talk of Hugh to-day," said Maria; "I want to be happy for a little bit. Oh, Emily, but I'm glad to see you again. You little darling, you look just as sweet and saucy as ever!"

Maria stayed some time, and visitors—most of

them by no means fashionable people—kept coming, “just for a sight of Miss Emily,” all day. It was not until the inmates of the Parsonage were sitting over the fire in the evening, that Emily had an opportunity of asking a question about Hugh.

“I want so much to ask you,” she said, “what is wrong with Hugh Vincent?”

“Did Maria say there was anything wrong with him?” said Mr. Darnell, after a look had passed between him and his wife.

“No, not exactly; but when I asked her why she had not followed Bertha’s example, she said, ‘We could not both leave our father.’”

“Yes; old Mr. Vincent has failed a good deal.”

“But Hugh? Why could not Hugh care for his father? He used to be so gentle and kindly, and the old man was so fond of him.”

“Emily; the plain truth is, that Hugh is very much changed. We never saddened you by mentioning it, and now I would prefer to leave you to see what the change is, for yourself.”

Emily was silent for some time. Then she said, “Tell me one thing; was it poor Gwennie’s doing?”

“Alas! yes. He has never been the same again. The only person he seems to care for as of old is yourself, my dear. As to the rest, I wish you to see for yourself.”

"Paul," said Mrs. Darnell to her husband, when they were alone, "why did you refuse to tell Emily about Hugh?"

"Because I have some hope that she may show the horror she will surely feel, and the shock may do him good."

Next morning, after breakfast, Emily said—

"Mammie, while you are busy at your house-keeping, I will walk over to the Vincents to see old Mr. Vincent, as I suppose he will not be able to come to see me."

"Oh no; he never leaves the fireside now. Yes, dear, go by all means, but be back to luncheon."

"But how will Cousin Emily find the way?" said little Ethel, shyly.

"Now, I like that, Miss Winthorp," said Emily "I knew the way, you very impertinent small person, before you were born. Should you like to come with me, to see that I go right?"

"*May* I walk with you?" And a look of perfect bliss came over the pretty little face.

"Mammie, is not the child like Gwen!" cried Emily, kissing her.

Very soon these two were on their way to Meadowlands. And a pleasant walk they had; not a very rapid one, because Emily was constrained to visit every cottage and to hold long conversations with every person they passed. At last,

however, they arrived at the first gate of Meadowlands, and entered the long green drive which, on this side, leads to the pleasure-grounds round the house. Even in winter this drive was pretty, and it was full of memories for Emily. She walked on in silence, until they were near another gate, which opened into the avenue. Then she became aware that Ethel was trying to attract her attention.

"What is it, Ethel?"

"If you please, Emily, may I stay here? I can run about and play while you pay your visit; I am quite safe here in the lane."

"Oh, but you must not be such a shy little pussycat! Come on and see Miss Vincent."

"I like Miss Vincent; but I would rather stay here to-day. *Please*, do let me."

"But why, child?"

Ethel came close to her, and whispered—"Mr. Hugh is in the avenue, and I am afraid of him."

"Afraid of Hugh,—nonsense, Ethel!" exclaimed Emily, startled.

"Oh, I know he would not hurt me; but he hates to see me. I heard him tell Miss Vincent to keep me out of sight if she must have me there at all; and so I never meet him now, if I can help it."

"Ethel, I rather think you are mistaken. But stay here, if you really wish it. I shall not be very long."

She opened the gate as she spoke, and passed in. Being short-sighted, she had not yet seen Hugh, and now began to think that Ethel must have made a mistake ; but a few steps more made her aware of a man standing in the middle of the avenue, the bright gleams of the wintry sun falling on his figure through the leafless boughs, apparently waiting for her. He was dressed carelessly—a rough shooting-jacket and a "billy-cock" hat, thick boots, no gloves, and a long spud in his hand, on the top of which he was supporting his chin. Emily was by no means sure that it was Hugh until she was quite close to him.

"Hugh!" she cried then, springing forward, "don't you know me?"

"I know you well enough," he said ; "you are not a bit changed. I believe in my heart, Emily Fane, that's the very jacket you bought with your first money."

"The very same, and so is the cap. No other articles of apparel ever gave me half so much pleasure, and so I take good care of them ; and I thought I should like to wear them at home."

"You're come to see my father," said Hugh, still standing bolt upright with his chin on the top of his spud.

"Partly," said she wistfully.

"Only partly ? He'll be glad to see you, at all events."

"I hope so—for the other person I came to see isn't: that is very plain."

"You did not want to see me! When the child told you I was here, you hesitated and had a great mind to turn back."

"You are wrong, Hugh. Ethel stopped me to ask leave to play about in the lane instead of coming on. Hugh, what do you mean? and do you know that you have not yet shaken hands with me?"

He put out his hand then, but in a queer, unwilling, shamefaced way. However, he turned and walked with her towards the house.

"What a grand avenue this is!" said Emily. "I have seen nothing like it, since I left home."

"Minsterview?" said he, looking at her suddenly.

"It is a fine place, as old as this I dare say, but in quite a different style. This is more to my taste; but then I know it better. Oh, Hugh, you don't keep the pleasure-ground as nice as it used to be!"

"My father cared for it because my mother did. Why should I? But you'll see more of Minsterview for the future, no doubt?"

"Why should you think so? It is not likely; for Sir Clarence has gone abroad for a year."

"Well, you see, I heard a report; but maybe it was not true. Is Claud coming here?"

"Yes, on Monday," she answered shortly, for she felt angry. Hugh burst into a loud, boisterous laugh.

"You're a wonder, Emily,—a wonder! There, I see Maria peeping out; I'll meet you again before you go."

He left her, and strode away. Emily gazed after him, but he was soon beyond the range of her vision. What *was* the change? Oh, what was wrong with gentle, kindly, courteous Hugh, whose manner she used to admire so much—at once protecting and full of tender respect? There was a change, too, even in his face; but that might be her fancy, as she had not yet seen him very distinctly. Maria met her at the door and took her in. Old Mr. Vincent was glad to see her, and yet he seemed very sad. He sighed, and said she brought back the good old times to his mind. "You are not much changed," he said. "Have you seen Hugh?"

"Yes, I met him in the avenue. Mr. Vincent, I made a vow to bring a present to every one at home, so you must be kind and not scorn my present to you. I could not think of anything else that would be of any use to you, Sir. Maria, don't laugh at me."

The present turned out to be a dozen silk pocket-handkerchiefs, beautifully soft and im-

mensely large, and, in colour, of the dull crimson dear to the snuff-taker. The old gentleman laughed heartily, looking like himself for the moment.

"Thank you, my dear. I don't think I ever had such handsome handkerchiefs as these: they are splendid, and so soft. Maria, you burn all the others: these will see me out, and never will I condescend to use the old ones again. Thank you, little Emily: it was kind of you to think of the old man."

"I have brought Hugh a whistle, to call up his dogs, you know. See what a pretty one it is."

The little gold whistle was much admired, and so was the brooch she had chosen for Maria. Then Emily stood up.

"I must come over again soon, but I dawdled so much on the road, that I have no time to stay to-day. Maria, come a bit of the way with me."

"As far as the lane—I shall not have time for more."

"Shall I leave the whistle here? Was it not dull of me not to give it to Hugh when I met him?"

"Perhaps we shall meet him again. Just wait, Emily, till I get a shawl. The day is cold, and my jacket is not enough."

She ran upstairs, and the old man sat looking thoughtfully at Emily. Perhaps he looked so long

that he forgot she was really there, for presently he muttered—"Emily's a good little girl—as good a little girl as ever lived. Ah! Gwennie Atheling has a great deal to answer for!"

Emily turned pale. She came up to his side, and said—"What do you mean, Sir? What is the matter with Hugh?"

"Eh, are you here still, little one? The matter with Hugh, did you say? It was none of your doing, my dear, I know that; it was Gwenevere's doing, but she has much to answer for. She has ruined my boy, body and soul. Hugh is not the same man, Emily,—he's changed—changed. And I was very proud of Hugh. He was my favourite son. It is sad to see—— But you must not think, you know, that he is always at it, like some. It is only at times: not a constant thing at all. But it will ruin him all the same. Run away, Emily, my dear, run away. I—can't talk about it." And he ended with a great sob, which nearly broke the tender heart of his little listener.

She went out into the porch without speaking. What could she say in the face of a sorrow like this? She understood, and yet would not understand; and when Maria came down, Emily seized her hand, and said—"Tell me in one word, Maria. What is it?—Hugh, I mean."

"Oh, Emily, did Father say anything? Poor

Father, it is killing him. Hugh—he takes too much, Emily : he'll end in being a drinker, if he is not one already. I have done all I could—I've begged and prayed, and scolded, and all is of no use. Oh, to see our Hugh like that ! Gweneverc Atheling has that to answer for. There'll be no blessing on her marriage, you may believe me. Emily, Hugh is coming after us. Don't let him know that I told you,—surely you had to know it, some time or other."

Emily turned upon her a face so white and sad, that the good-natured girl wished she had kept back the truth a little longer.

"Give him that, Maria, with my *dear* love. Say I was in a hurry. Good-bye."

And springing forward, she ran up the avenue at a speed that Maria could never have equalled—she was out of sight in a moment. She forgot Ethel altogether, and ran at the same flying pace until she reached the second gate. There she sat down upon a big stone and burst into tears.

"Oh, Gwennie, Gwennie, what can I do ! what can I do !"

A little terrified voice aroused her.

"Cousin Emily ! what has frightened you so ?"

"Ethel ! I had forgotten you, child. Let us go home. Do not be frightened, dear ; I am only sorry for some one. Let us go home."

"Yes, come to Mammie," said the child with a rapid glance back along the lane ; for surely Mr. Hugh had frightened Emily and made her run away, and he might be after them even now. The walk home was performed very rapidly.

"Mammie," said Emily, going into the drawing-room, having sent Ethel to put away her walking dress. "Mammie, I know about Hugh, now. Oh, Mammie, what can we do?"

"Alas, my dear,—what indeed! Paul has spoken to him again and again. His old father has intreated him. Nothing has done any good."

"Tell me all about it now. When did it begin?"

"It was after that last terrible illness—since his sorrow. He was terribly weak, and was ordered wine and brandy. It was long before any of us remarked that he never left off taking it. He did not exceed at first, nor does he often betray himself to strangers, even now ; but I fear it is a constant habit, and——"

"His father said it was not a habit—only at times."

"My dear, Maria keeps him in ignorance as far as she can. But what is really ruining Hugh is the constant habit, at night."

"And they all say—but I will not say it. Oh, poor Gwennie, if she ever hears of this."

"Yes, poor Gwennie. It is an awful thing. When you said yesterday, Emily, that Gwenever

meant to do right, and was only weak, I could not help thinking that her weakness had done as much harm as many a sin. Paul says, it seems to him as if finding her to be so little what he thought her, had shaken Hugh's faith in everything good, and taken from him the power of keeping right. He has fits of vehement remorse and self-abhorrence, but they do him no good."

Emily said no more, but she was very thoughtful all that day. She would not leave the house all the rest of the week, lest Hugh might come while she was out. But he did not come. On Sunday, his tall figure, still erect and soldierlike, was to be seen in Church—not in the Choir, where he used to sit. He did not sing, nor did he join in the responses. When the service was over, Maria came to speak to her, but Hugh turned away towards his own home.

"I am going to speak to Hugh," said Emily, "don't wait for me, Mammie."

Mrs. Darnell looked doubtful, but Emily whispered—"I must—for Gwennie's sake. I can but fail. Pray that I may not, Mammie,—for Gwennie's sake."

She waited for no answer, but hurried along the path that Hugh had taken towards Meadowlands.



CHAPTER XVIII.

"FOR GWENNIE'S SAKE."



UGH VINCENT had left the Churchyard by a private path which led through some of his own land, from the Church to the beech avenue near the house. He was walking slowly, expecting Maria to follow him, but if he had been thinking of what was going on, he would have known that the light flying footstep behind him was not Maria's. But he was plodding moodily on, dreaming vaguely of the time which Emily's presence recalled so vividly, when suddenly she appeared at his side. She looked up into his face, and said without hesitation or pause—

"I cannot bear it, Hugh. I must say something to you."

Hugh stared.

"You will forgive me; for it is not for myself

I plead. Nor even for your sake, though we are old friends, dear Hugh, and you know I love you. Nor even to do right, for I did not dare to tell Mr. Darnell, because I knew he would say it was no business of mine. It's for Gwennie's sake, Hugh. Poor weak Gwennie, who wronged you,—but not wilfully. Won't you hear me for Gwennie's sake?"

Hugh turned his face away, and after a short silence, during which Emily thought she must have fallen, she trembled so, he said—

"Yes, I will hear you; indeed, you give me no choice. But I don't quite know what you mean."

"I will tell you; and if you are angry with me, and bid me leave you, I will. But oh, don't say that. Hear me patiently, and grant my request. I watched you to-day, Hugh; no response—no praise sung. And I hear things of you—things said in bitter sorrow. And I must and will make one appeal to you. I know that she treated you very badly. I am not excusing her, nor denying it. But it was not as wicked in her as it would be in another, because she was weak—easily influenced, and always so anxious to please those who were about her. I think the approval of those about her made a kind of conscience to her; and they got rid of me, and never.

gave her a chance. The day she was married——
Were you in the Cathedral, Hugh?"

"I was. I did not mean to be seen."

"She saw you; and the sight brought back old thoughts. If you had seen her afterwards! I had hard work to keep her from betraying her agony of remorse to her husband. I do not know that I succeeded; for when they were going, she seemed to lose her senses; she ran and clung to me, crying something. I hardly caught it, but I fear he did. And I know by her letters that she is not happy. I never hoped it; Harold is a hard, exacting man. You know what a gentle, timid creature she is. Think of her now, with sorrow in her heart, separated from all who cared for her, perhaps not kindly treated; think of this, and say, will you add to her suffering the unutterable misery of knowing that she ruined, not only your happiness here, but your soul for ever! Oh, I might well remind you of what you were—how we all looked up to you, how much your influence did for good, and how much harm your fall must work; but I can only think of my poor Gwennie, because I love her so dearly in spite of all. And *you*, who loved her better still, to lay this burden of sin and misery upon her. Oh, Hugh! to think that you should be the one to do it!"

They had been standing still now for some

minutes, having just reached the end of the field path, and the entrance to the Beech Avenue. Hugh stood gazing spell-bound into the pleading face, until Emily suddenly began to sob and cry pitifully. A step was heard behind them ; it was Maria.

"Come this way," Hugh said, making her lean upon him, and turning into the avenue. He led her away from the house, and walked on until Maria had entered the avenue and turned towards home. Then he stopped, looked down at her again, and said gently, "Don't cry, Emily."

"Then you are not angry with me ?"

"Angry with you ! No. I am a beast, but I'm not so bad as that. What do you want me to do ?"

She hastily dried her eyes, and looked up into his face with such intense earnestness, that he almost forgot that she was only the little friend he had known so long. It was no longer Emily Fane and Hugh Vincent, but a soul pleading with a soul—ay, and for a soul. •

"Hugh, I want you to swear solemnly, this very day, that you will never—sin in this way, again. For Gwennie's sake—for your sin will surely lie at her door."

"That I will never drink again," he said, naming the sin from the mention of which she had shrunk..

A "LEAL, LIGHT HEART."

"Yes," she said. "For Gwennie's sake."

"I will do it," he answered. "I don't know how I am to live—how I am to bear myself when I have time to realize what I once was, and what I have become; but I will do it, Emily—now, before I have time to repent. God help me! Come with me to the Church. Mr. Darnell has often urged me to do this, so he will be glad now. Come, Emily."

It was Mr. Darnell's habit to spend the time between the services in his vestry room. There, any one who wished to consult him was sure to find him. And there they found him now, alone. His deep and solemn joy, when Hugh told him what he had come for, touched the young man's heart. The vow was soon taken—the little medal put into his hand.

"Come here, Emily, and put it to my chain for me. Here, where all can see it. May God help me to keep my oath!"

"Come into the Church, Hugh," she said. And led him gently to the very place where he had often knelt beside Gwenevere, in the happy old days. Emily knelt down, whispering, "Let us pray for grace and strength."

Then Hugh went home, and Emily sat in the little vestry, and cried to her heart's content. She was so completely unnerved, that Mr. Darnell shut up the Church and took her home, advising his wife

to put her to bed, and not to let her talk, "or you'll be ill to-morrow, Emily; and what will Claud say to that?"

The first event next day was a visit from Maria Vincent, who did not even wait to say good morning, but seized Emily in her arms.

"You dear, good child! you brave little creature! How did you do it? Hugh told us what he has done, and Father was going to bless him for it, but he said, 'Bless Emily Fane, for it is her doing.' He gave me this note for you, and Father bid me say that he will bless you every day he lives."

Emily opened her note.

"MY DEAR EMILY,

"You will not see me again for some time, for by my Father's advice I am going to my cousin William Vincent for a time. He is a doctor, and lives in York. I mean to tell him all about it, and put myself in his care for a time. I am sure it is my wisest plan. The battle will be a hard one, and I want all the help I can get. I know I shall have your prayers, and, thank God, my own too, for I can venture to pray again now. I cannot thank you; but I shall never forget what you have done. . . .

"Your affectionate friend,

"HUGH VINCENT."

Maria went home, looking quite bright again ; and then Emily gave herself up to preparing for Claud's arrival. She ransacked the garden and the little greenhouse for flowers ; she made the drawing-room look its best ; she cooked a pudding which she declared that Claud loved—Mrs. Darnell protesting that *she* had never heard him express the least preference for it ; finally, she spent a solemn hour, dressing herself in her most becoming attire. Then, betaking herself to the gate, she watched for him, as she had watched before on at least one memorable occasion. This time she shut herself out of the Parsonage grounds, leaned against the gate, and unconsciously—such is the strange force of association—she began to sing, "When wild war's distant blast was blown." But she had not arrived at "A leal, light heart was in my breast," when she saw the oft-borrowed pony-carriage coming, with two people in it. Claud was out of the carriage like a flash. It was well that the pony was a docile beast, for Mr. Darnell had to open the gate for himself, poor man ; the young people forgot all about him.

"I'm ashamed to remember that I half doubted my little girl," he said aloud, as he drove up to the house.

"Oh, Claud ! *my* Claud ! my great, big, strong, good Claud ! What a time it is since I saw you !"

"My dear child! So you *are* mine still, Emily?"

"Don't talk nonsense! Whose else should I be, pray? Let me look at you."

"You are better worth looking at—but we haven't a glass here. Except your specs. Here, perch them on your saucy nose, and let me see if you look like a baby in them still."

Emily obeyed, and started.

"Claud! what is the matter with your eyes?"

"You tiresome child—or rather, bother my folly for making you put on your specs. You would never have found me out if I hadn't done that, and I did not want to tell you until we had had some comfort in each other."

"To tell me what? Oh, Claud, what is it?"

"Nothing to get white over. I have had a good deal of discomfort with my eyes lately, and Mr. Preston (my Rector, you know) advised me to consult an oculist. *He* advises rest: no writing, no reading, no anything at all, for a month, and then he will be better able to say what is the matter. So I have a whole month to stay with you—think of that! and you will read and write and sing for me, if you have not become too fine a lady for that sort of thing."

"Discomfort?" Emily said; "tell me exactly what you mean by that. Is it pain, or what?"

"Pain, but not severe: a kind of dimness some-

times. I am not to sit facing a strong light, and I am to use a shade when I am out in the sun. Emily, I wish I had kept this to myself for a while. I had hardly seen your bright bit of a face, and now you look so frightened, and there is nothing to be frightened about."

"Honestly, Claud, you've told me all?"

"All."

"And you always will tell me all? Promise to keep nothing from me, even for a moment."

"I promise—anything to make you look like yourself again. *What* a donkey I was!"

"Sir, a very true remark. You always were a candid person. Come home; Mammie must want to see you."

A privilege for which Mammie might have waited, I fear, if Emily had not got a fright, and wanted time to calm herself. She watched anxiously to see if Mrs. Darnell remarked anything amiss with Claud; but she, having been warned by her husband, made no remark.

When Emily had got over the first shock, I am not sure that Claud's misfortune did not add to the happiness of both parties; it brought them so near to each other. He had a book coming out, and I do not know which of them enjoyed the correcting of the proofs most. He was writing a poem, and as he delighted in walking up and

down, dictating the lines, she thoroughly enjoyed writing them down, and amused him highly by the pains she took with the penmanship; her capital letters were something very beautiful. She proved the best of critics, too; her ear for melody was so fine, and she by no means lacked "the courage of her opinions." On one occasion Claud greatly fancied an expression which *he* said was strong, and which she maintained was barbarous. They argued hotly for two hours, without settling the matter; but next day, on hearing the passage read to him, Claud acknowledged that she was right, and submitted to milder language. Then she sang for him, and there could be no doubt that her voice had greatly improved. She said to him once, "Claud, what a pity it is that Gwen and I cannot change voices! mine would do well enough for Harold Atheling."

"But Gwen's would not do for me, thank you."

"Oh, Claud! why, her voice was almost perfect! Aunt Gundred said she ought to have been on the stage. Poor Gwen, how shocked she was!"

"On the stage, yes. No doubt her voice is splendid, but you have something more than a voice. There's a soul in it. I never felt tearful about her singing, but I am sometimes greatly disposed that way when you sing. Go on, Emily; sing that old Scotch thing you used to be always lilting, about 'A leaf, light heart.'"

That happy month flew by only too fast. Claud declared that his eyes were quite well ; and certainly, if they were not, it was not for want of care. He went to London at the appointed time, and the oculist said that they were certainly better, and that another month of equal care, combined with the use of some drops which he ordered, would probably complete the cure. Mr. Preston knew the value of his curate far too well to grudge him a second month, if it was to end in a cure ; so Claud came back to Silverton. It would have been quite as happy a time as the first, but for "those horrid drops," as Emily called them. Mrs. Darnell's hand was not steady enough to apply them, and Emily had to do it herself, and they gave her patient exquisite pain, reducing him to hide in a darkened room for an hour, until it had to some extent subsided. Poor little Emily used to spend that hour hovering near the door of his room, in tears ; until he found this out, and contrived always to ask her to do something for him during his hour of retirement. All this time, to the Darnells' surprise, neither Claud nor Emily seemed nervous about the result of his attack.

"Don't suggest any fears, Anne," said Mr. Darnell ; "they are young and happy, and so, of course, fear is far from them. If this must come, it will come soon enough, and they'll meet it none the

less bravely for their present perfect happiness. Poor children, they deserve their holiday ; let them enjoy it."

At the end of the second month Claud returned to his duty, with the oculist's consent. He was to be very careful, and to spare his eyes as much as possible, but they were now quite well.

The new year was a fortnight old when Emily returned to Fairminster. Her return was hastened by a letter from Hortense, telling her that her Aunt was far from well. She found Lady Le Mesurier really ill ; her spirits had given way, and her appetite was quite gone. There was no doubt that she was really ill, but her illness was certainly caused by mortification and resentment at the defeat of her plans for Emily and Clarence. That she was defeated she had acknowledged to herself, and defeat did not agree with her. Mrs. Appleby was at Moorside when Emily arrived, and she remained to spend the evening. After dinner, Lady Le Mesurier being absent, she remarked confidentially—

"My dear child, what induced you to come home? Your Aunt told me she did not expect you until February. Did she write for you?"

"No, she did not."

"You will wish yourself away again very soon—unless, indeed—perhaps you found it dull?"

"I never could be dull at home, and certainly not this time, at all events."

"Then, my dear, you were all the more silly to come here. I assure you"—sinking her voice to a whisper—"your Aunt's temper has become very trying—very trying indeed. I find it very hard to put up with it, and I can't think why you came back sooner than you need—when you say you weren't dull, too."

"Aunt Gundred has been kind to me, and when Hortense wrote to say that she was ill and in low spirits, I came, as a matter of course," answered Emily, dryly. The ingratitude of the "Animated No" disgusted her extremely; she had yet to learn that an alliance offensive and defensive is not friendship, and that when favours are given in return for secret service they engender no gratitude; nor, indeed, deserve it.

Emily set herself to cheer her Aunt with such good will that she soon perceived an improvement; and when the trying east winds set in, Lady Le Mesurier shut up Moorside House and went abroad, of course taking Emily with her. All this time Emily heard occasionally from Hugh Vincent, and had the happiness of knowing that he was improving in health and spirits, and that his terrible temptation was losing its power over him more and more.



CHAPTER XIX.

SIR CLARENCE TO THE RESCUE.

LADY LÉ MESURIER returned to her home in June, quite herself again. She resumed all her old habits, took Mrs. Appleby into favour again, and was in every respect the same as of old, except that she had become more really fond of Emily, and would never willingly let her be absent. Poor Emily had indulged in a delightful hope that when her birthday came round, her Aunt would signify her consent to her marriage, now that she had given up all thought for Sir Clarence and was so fond of her; but my Lady did nothing of the kind! Emily was a great pleasure to her, and she meant to keep her as long as she could.

Before June was quite over, Sir Clarence came home, looking remarkably well, and bringing with him great spoils of the chase. His manner to

Emily was so friendly and brotherly that she soon ceased to avoid him, and he seemed to her very much improved by his long absence from his idle life at Fairminster. Indeed, he appeared to feel that it would be a pity to fall back into his old ways, and Lady Le Mesurier's wish to see him a useful member of society seemed about to be gratified.

August had begun. One day Sir Clarence rode over to Moorside rather early, fully determined to ask Emily what was wrong with her, for he had remarked that she was by no means in her usual spirits. To his amazement he found her alone in the drawing-room, crying so heartily that she did not hear him enter.

"Miss Fane! what has happened? Is my Aunt ill? It can't be that, though," added he, reflecting privately that even Emily Fane, though a kind little creature, could hardly feel so much for Lady Le Mesurier!

"Oh, Sir Clarence, you startled me. I didn't hear you coming in."

"What are you crying for?" said he with great directness.

"I do not want to tell you," she answered quietly, drying her eyes as she spoke.

"Then you are very unkind," he said. "You won't count me as a friend, I suppose? For even

if I can do nothing for you I can be sorry for you, and even that is a comfort when people are friends."

Emily laughed faintly at his schoolboy directness of speech.

"I *do* count you as a friend, indeed ; but there is no use in my telling you why I am crying, because you can do no good."

"Tautology," quoth Sir Clarence, briefly. "You *will* tell me, won't you, Emily? I really want to know."

Still she was silent, until he said—

"No bad news of Mr. Beresford, I hope?"

Whereupon she began to cry again.

"What! it is bad news, then? Is he ill?"

His sympathy was so evident, and her need of it so great, that Emily forgot her reasons for being silent, and said—

"No news at all—and I am really frightened. Last year he had a dreadful attack in his eyes ; he was obliged to be idle for two months, and I know he suffered terribly, though he never would say so. And now I have had no letter for nearly a fortnight; and neither has Mrs. Darnell ; and Mr. Darnell is ill, so neither of them can go to see what is wrong. And Aunt Gundred won't send Carberry, and I don't like to send Patty ; and I'm sure his eyes are bad again."

"He did not say anything about them lately, did he?"

"Nothing."

"Well, we shall soon know what is wrong. Give me his address, Miss Fane; and what am I to say to him if I find he has only forgotten to write?"

"What do you mean?"

"To see him, of course. Go up by the evening train; see Mr. Beresford to-morrow morning, come down by the 12.30, and come here to luncheon."

"Will you really go? Oh, Sir Clarence, how kind, how very kind you are! Do find out what is the matter with him, for I know his eyes are bad again. You don't know what you are doing for me."

"You don't know what I would do for you," he answered quietly; "nor, for that matter, do I."

He walked off before she could reply, and Emily felt a pang of compunction; but I must confess that she made no effort to stop him. Lady Le Mesurier was very angry when she heard where Clarence had gone.

"I cannot imagine your doing so cruel a thing," said she with virtuous severity.

"I did not ask him to go; he offered, and I am far too anxious to refuse his help. If you would have sent Carberry, Aunt Gundred, Sir Clarence would never have heard of it."

"Of your anxiety, I presume you mean. Why did you mention it to him? it really was hardly modest."

"I was crying, and did not hear him coming;

and, Aunt Gundred, I dare say you did not mean that, but there are some things that ought not to be said.”

Sir Clarence did not come back next day, but in the afternoon a letter arrived instead.

“DEAR MISS FANE,

“I have seen Mr. Beresford ; not very well, though, for you were right enough—his eyes are bad again.* He has to keep in a darkened room, and dares not attempt to write. It came on quite suddenly, and he was in hopes of being better in a day or two, and did not want to frighten you. He is awfully vexed to find that you were frightened. I am to see him again to-morrow after the doctor has been with him ; and I am quite glad to be in town, for Humc is here, and we can see about mounting some of our groups of beasts. I am bringing home a lioness and cubs for my Aunt, that will frighten the Animated No out of her senses when she sees it in the hall.

“Yours sincerely,

“CLARENCE LE MESURIER.”

The next day brought another letter ; the doetor had not thought Claud any better, but he hoped next time to send better news.

Claud had never been told anything about Sir Clarence ; but, not being a fool, he had guessed a

good deal, and this made him embarrassed and uneasy about sending messages through him. However, on the third day, as Sir Clarence was sitting with him, he was suddenly hailed thus—

"Look here, Beresford."

"I should be delighted to oblige you," said Claud, with a short laugh; "but that is just what I am not to do."

"Well, then, listen to me. I know what you are thinking of. You won't send messages to Miss Fane, because you guess something about me. *She* didn't tell you," he added, confidently.

"Not a word. It was only a guess. Am I right, Sir Clarence?"

"You are right. Some day I shall tell you all about it; but just now all I want to say is this—I want to be a brother to her; and I can, if you will let me. You've no notion how she was fretting about you; and my poor Aunt is a selfish creature, and won't so much as talk about you. The poor girl is so alone, don't you see? I want you to forget all you've guessed about me, and just dictate a letter to her. Do, old fellow, if you have the heart of a mouse!"

To this urgent entreaty Claud gave way. The first letter was wondrous polite and well worded, but after that Claud began to forget what he had guessed, and to dictate more freely. Emily's replies

were very short; she felt terribly embarrassed about it.

Day after day went by, and still the Doctor refused to allow Claud to use his eyes in any way. He suffered far more pain than in the first attack, and the remedies were severe enough to reduce his strength considerably. It was nearly three weeks after Sir Clarence came to town, when one day he found Claud in very low spirits.

"Beresford," said he, "you have had Fitzhenry here; does he think you worse?"

"No; he says I am better. The inflammation is subdued."

"Then, if you are better, why are you so down in the mouth, old fellow?"

"That is not all he said," answered Claud, steadying his voice carefully.

"Ay? What more? Tell me, Beresford: what more did he say?"

"He says——" But the voice shook, in spite of all effort. "Don't mind me, Le Mesurier; I'm ashamed of my weakness. He says that perfect rest and idleness, great care, and attention to my health and strength, may save me from going blind. *May* save me. He promises nothing, and I can see has little hope."

Clarence uttered a sort of dismayed shout, and then sat very still and silent for some time.

"It's awful," he said at last.

"It is a great blow," answered Claud, standing up and beginning to walk about the room. "For somehow—I was stupid, I suppose; but in all my illness I never thought of this—I never had a doubt but that I should be all right again. So I have no plans settled; and now of course Preston must get another curate. He has been very long-suffering."

"Knows that it will be long before he gets another Curate who will fill St. Bride's, even to the aisles. You must resign, of course."

"Yes; I must. It must be done."

"And what shall you do then, old fellow?"

"That's a difficult question. Go to Silverton, I suppose, until—some change takes place."

"Until you are married, you mean. Why don't you get married at once?"

"Ah, if I could!" cried poor Claud, his longing for his bright little consoler almost making him break down. "My dear Sir, perhaps you are not aware that Lady Le Mesurier can forbid the banns until Emily is twenty-three; and that will not be until May."

"What folly!" exclaimed Sir Clarence, angrily. "My Aunt cannot refuse consent under the circumstances. She must know that Miss Fane will marry you in May, and why on earth should she make her wait until then, when the poor little

thing is fretting her heart out to be taking care of you herself!"

"But you must see that I cannot press it. Her objection is that I am an obscure and penniless curate; and I cannot hope that this objection, raised when I had a fair prospect of doing something—for I really had, you know,—will be withdrawn when I am—what I am now?"

"And what is that?"

"If you mean, in exactly what circumstances do I now stand, I will tell you. Thanks to my uncle, I have about fifty pounds a year, all my other funds having gone in my education. I had saved a little, but my illness and doctors' fees have run away with a good deal of that, but I can live on it until it is gone, and by that time I shall probably be a blind pauper. God help me!" he added, in a low voice, letting himself fall anyhow upon the hard black sofa, and hiding his face in his hands.

"Beresford, old fellow, look here. I can't bear to see you like this. You won't be blind—I feel sure of it; you're perfectly certain to recover—perfectly. I never knew a fellow go blind; did you, now?" went on poor Clarence, desperately.

"Have you the gift of second sight?" said Claud, sitting up and trying to recover himself.

"Second sight? What do you mean? Wish I had, and I'd give you one sight. Look here, old

fellow; you dictate a letter now, to Miss Fane. You just say, 'Your Aunt's determination to make us miserable until May is simply absurd, and we are not bound to give in to her obstinate selfishness. You tell her you don't mean to—come to Silverton if she makes herself unpleasant, and we'll be married at once and go abroad for the winter.' Come, Beresford, I have the desk open. Begin; I can just see to scribble if I sit here."

"Le Mesurier, you are the kindest fellow; but don't you see that I cannot do this? If I were anything but a clergyman, I would do it, for I do not think that it would be wrong in itself. But I have no right to give people an excuse for speaking ill of me, as they surely would. It would be wrong, Le Mesurier; I cannot do it."

"Bless me! these hair-splitting notions are beyond me. Tell her to try what she can do with the old lady, then."

"I suppose you know what the world will say I ought to do?" said Claud.

"No. What?" and somehow Sir Clarence's voice sounded warlike.

"Tell her that I will not hold her bound to a life so sadly darkened—a life which can only be a failure now, as far as worldly matters are concerned. Eh! what's the matter?" as a horrible clatter made itself heard.

I've knocked over the desk, spilt the ink, and strewed the floor with your papers," said Sir Clarence.

Claud rose, and was coming to assist in rectifying the misfortune.

"Stay where you are," went on the other, "or maybe I shall knock *you* down next—spill your blood and break your bones. I feel as if I'd like to. Are you going to talk in that cold-blooded way to Emily Fane?—you, to whom she has been so true and loving? Then I take back every word I ever said to her about you. I *don't* think you more worthy of her than I am; for never would I think of money where she is concerned!"

"Hillo!" cried Claud, "I've raised a spirit, it seems."

"Are you going to do it?" asked Clarence, sternly.

"Not a bit of it. I only said the world would say I ought. But you are right in one thing," he added, candidly. "I have unworthy regrets about her fortune sometimes. If the money had come to me, I should have been happier, I'm afraid. You are more generous than I." • • •

"Don't be an ass," growled Clarence. "*You* are tried, and I am not. I beg your pardon, Beresford. I say, the ink is *all* over the place. You go to your own room for a moment, while I ring up the maid, admit the light, and set things to rights." . .

"I'm only thankful it is not a surgeon to put me together again whose services are needed," remarked Claud, as he obeyed this order.

"Here we are again, all right," said Sir Clarence, presently. "Come, shall I read a bit to you? I'll sit close to the window, and you stay on the sofa. I shall read you ——'s speech; it's grand."

It might be; but Sir Clarence's reading was quite the reverse. He gulped and gobbled, mistook one word for another, read a line out of place and repeated another twice—perhaps to make up for it—and, in fact, nearly drove Claud mad before he concluded. The impression upon Claud's mind was that his friend could not possibly understand a word of what he had read; but there he was mistaken.

"Fine speech that," said Sir Clarence; "close reasoning, isn't it? I don't see how —— can show his face again. His business is settled, I should say." Claud was silent; he had not the faintest idea what it was all about.

When Sir Clarence went back to his hotel that night, he had made up his mind to immediate action. He must go home for a day or two, to see Emily; and he would not leave Claud alone. He accordingly wrote to Mrs. Darnell, asking her if she could possibly come, or send any one to take care of Beresford for a few days, as he was very low and

not fit to be left alone ; and he (Sir Clarence) was obliged to leave him for a few days. Mr. Darnell was still too seriously ill to spare his wife, but Hugh Vincent arrived at Claud's lodgings the next day. Claud welcomed him with delight, and introduced him to Sir Clarence.

"I can leave you with an easy conscience now," said Sir Clarence. "I will return as soon as I can, Mr. Vincent, and set you free, for I know this is a busy time with you. But you see this fellow is rather inclined to mope, and so I was determined not to leave him alone."

"It is very kind of you," said Hugh.

"Good-bye, old fellow," exclaimed Sir Clarence, and the shutting of the door revealed to Claud that he had left the room.

"That's sudden !" remarked Hugh.

"He's had something on his mind these three days," answered Claud, "which has kept him in a very absent frame. He has been kinder to me than I can tell you—like a brother."

Yet it must be confessed that the change of nurses was much to Claud's advantage. Besides being an old friend, Hugh was by nature sympathetic and tender ; he was moreover a good reader. These two had not been much together since they were boys, and they had much to talk about. So we may leave Claud as Sir Clarence did, with an

easy conscience, and follow that gentleman to Fairminster.

He had written to Emily the day before, as follows :—

"MY DEAR MISS FANE,

"I have been having a long talk with Beresford, and I am now going to tell you all about it ; and, being an awkward fellow, I shall do it badly, and he would do it well ; but I have reasons for forestalling him, which will make you ready to excuse me if I give you pain. Indeed, my dear friend, I do not see how you are to hear the truth without being pained, and I believe it will be best to blurt it out anyhow. The doctor does not think as well of Claud's eyes as he ought—I mean, of course, as well as we could wish. Still, he says that with great care, perfect idleness, and keeping up his health, he may recover. That sounds as if he were ill, which he is not, though pulled down by the remedies. It is only his eyes ; the danger is that he will lose his sight. Now I have told you the worst, and what a clumsy fellow I am, to be sure !

"He is in wretched spirits. Says he'll be a pauper and a lot more nonsense. The plain fact is, he wants *you*, and wants you very badly. You could care for him as no one else can, and he would be

happy and at ease, which might make all the difference between getting well and getting worse. And if you were kept from him until May, and the poor fellow never *saw* you again, I feel it would be very hard lines on him. So now take my advice—tell my Aunt how the case stands, and ask her to consent. If she enacts the stern guardian or goes on with any nonsense, you just say, ‘I am of age, my affairs are in my own hands, I mean to be married next month, and I’m going to Silverton to-morrow; now do your worst.’ And I will make my appearance to-morrow and back you up. Seriously, she would probably do nothing, and I do not see that she can do any harm.

“It is well for me that I broke through a rule I made for my own comfort long ago, and read this over; for as it stands you would certainly think that I was wanting to arrange all this without Beresford’s knowledge. He does not know that I am writing to you, but we have talked the matter over; and of his being in a hurry there could be no doubt, but he said he could not propose the line I have advised you to take. Some scruple about setting people talking of a clergyman. So I thought that I would talk to you about it; you are not a clergyman, so you need not mind.

“Ever your friend and brother

(which sounds like a nigger song),

“CLARENCE LE MESURIER.”

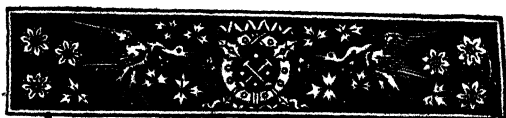
Emily read this letter two or three times. She did not cry ; the grief was too deep for tears this time.

"I knew it !" she said aloud. "I knew it would be so when he was so bad again. Oh, my dear Claud ! All his bright promise, all his plans for usefulness, all his enjoyment of beauty, gone—gone ! And to think that I have been kept here, and have lost all this happy time ! But that is selfishness. I ought to be glad that now I can lighten the blow. Oh, I will give myself up to that for the future. What a proud task for me, to prevent *such* a career from being quite cut short ! I can write for him, and read to him, as we used to do at Silverton ; and care about money need never touch him. Yes, God has been very good to us. If we were dependent now upon his work, it might really kill him."

She read the letter again.

"So you are clumsy, are you, Clarence ! Dear me ! when I first came here and hated him so for staring, how little I guessed what a noble heart he had."

Little she thought, now, how much of his nobility had been gained by loving a noble woman.



CHAPTER XX.

ANOTHER WEDDING.



MILY knocked at the door of her Aunt's private sitting-room.

"Come in. Is it you, Emily? Come in, my dear; I am not busy."

She certainly was not, as she was lying on a sofa, doing nothing.

"Aunt Gundred, I want to talk seriously to you," began Emily, seating herself. "I have had very bad news of Claud, and I must talk to you about it."

My Lady had actually opened her mouth to say that she was not in the least interested in Mr. Beresford, but just as Emily concluded there was the most pathetic little quiver in her voice; she scolded herself for it, but the weakness won a hearing for her. No one could live with Emily and not love her a little, if unfortunately so con-

stituted as to be unable to love her much. Lady Le Mesurier loved her a little, and was touched by the quiver in the clear voice.

"Is he ill?" said she.

"He is; he has something dreadful the matter with his eyes. Oh, Aunt Gundred! Sir Clarence says they fear he will go blind."

The mention of Clarence was impolitic; Lady Le Mesurier stiffened visibly.

"You know what I think of Clarence's presence there," said she.

"It could not be helped," Emily answered, vaguely. "Now, the doctor says that Claud must have perfect rest, must never use his eyes, and must take great care of himself. Of course, he does not know how to take care of himself—men never do; and it is my place to do it; my duty, my pride, and my happiness. We've been engaged so long, and now that he wants me so much, I cannot bear the further delay. Dear Aunt Gundred, do give your consent to our marriage. I hope you will, for to keep me here when you can only delay it until May would be unreasonable, and *most* unkind."

Lady Le Mesurier was dreadfully put out. She would miss Emily terribly, let the parting come when it would; but with the summer before her it might be less dreary to be again alone. Yet I

doubt if she knew how much this thought influenced her when she answered—

"My dear child, you surely have the strangest ideas. When Mr. Beresford was a healthy man, and, I believe, not unlikely to rise in his profession, I thought him most presumptuous for holding you to your silly engagement. And now that he will be perfectly dependent upon you, he coolly asks me to consent to it at once; tying you for life to a most wearisome and miserable task, too! A pretty guardian I should be if I consented!"

"One word, Aunt Gundred. Claud has *not* asked you, coolly or otherwise. It is my own request."

"You romantic little goose! And do you really think that I can allow you actually to ask him to marry you? Put it out of your head, my dear; such a course would be unprecedented, and really absurd."

"Aunt Gundred, do not, please do not, drive me to defy you. I don't want to do so. I love you, and would gladly part with you lovingly, but Claud is my first thought, as he ought to be. If you persist in refusing, I must only do what I think right, and let you do your worst. I don't know what you can do; but it can only be for a few months."

"My dear girl," said Lady Le Mesurier, rather

startled, "you cannot marry without my consent."

"That remains to be seen," said Emily. "I am very sorry that you refuse to hear reason on this subject. But since you drive me to it, I must tell you plainly that I will no longer obey you."

Both ladies having by this time lost their temper, the interview came to an abrupt end. Emily went back to her own room, summoned Patty, and desired her to pack up her goods as quickly and quietly as might be. Patty stared, but a few words of explanation were enough for her. Emily employed herself in putting up her paint-box, and other possessions, until dinner time. Then she went down; but she was grave and silent, and so, indeed, was Lady Le Mesurier.

Next morning, just as Emily was thinking of going to the Eustaces for help and advice, a fly rattled up to the door, and out sprang Sir Clarence.

"Well, Miss Fane, here I am, you see. You had my letter?"

"How can I ever thank you?" said Emily.

"Easy enough. Say, 'Thank you, Clarence; you didn't do that badly.' Say it, Emily, do."

"Thank you, Clarence, with all my heart."

"And, 'you didn't do that badly.'"

"You did more for me than I can say. She will not hear of it, Clarence."

"Oh, she won't, won't she? Old—Lady. And what are you going to do?"

"I have packed up everything, and meant to go to Silvertown. But I am so afraid of getting Mr. Darnell into trouble."

"A better plan would be to come to London and be married there. But let me see what I can do with my aunt; for, you see, it will be much pleasanter—sound better for Beresford—if you were married here. If she will not hear reason, you shall go at once. Here's a fly ready. And I pity you," he added, with a glance at the shabby old vehicle. "Won't your little bones ache for a week to come?"

"Aunt Gundred is in her sitting-room," said Emily. "But, Clarence, I never could do that. I must get Mr. Darnell's advice."

"I'm going to 'beard the lion in his den.' See what talking to a poet does for a fellow. I declare I believe I quoted something, didn't I? Go to the drawing-room and wait for me."

So saying, Sir Clarence sprang upstairs, three at a time, and presently gave a tremendous knock at the forbidden door. Lady Le Mesurier was so moved in spirit by the audacious loudness of the knock, that with wonderful swiftness she was at the door, and threw it open; then paused, astonished.

"My *dear* Clarence, is the house on fire?" said she, mildly.

"No, that's not it, but it might nearly as well be. How are you, Aunt Gundred? Well, I hope. I want a little serious talk with you."

"Well, since you *are* here, come in," said Lady Le Mesurier; and seated herself majestically.

"I beg your pardon; I ran up without thinking. Aunt Gundred, did Miss Fane tell you yesterday that it was by my advice that she spoke to you?"

"No, she did not. But it could make no possible difference."

"Will you let me put it before you as I see it, you know? Because, though you are a clever woman and I'm not a clever man, there are things which the stupidest man sees more clearly than a woman can."

"I will gladly hear what you have to say, Clarence; but you know it is I, after all, who am Miss Fane's guardian."

"Oh yes; but you know she's legally of age. It is only by some absurd will that you have any authority at all, and if you use it in this arbitrary (good word that, but awfully hard to say) way, you know, any court of justice would set it aside. Didn't Miss Fane tell you plainly that she meant to risk it?"

"She did, but I trust that reflection will convince her that she must not take any rash step."

"Well, reflection hasn't," said Clarence, shaking his head. "She has her things packed, and there's a fly at the door. She's waiting to see if I can do anything with you. Now, what can you do, you know? You *can* tell Carberry and the rest to prevent her leaving the house, but, after all, that would be *infra dig.*, wouldn't it? particularly as she'd probably smile sweetly, and walk out in spite of them. I must stand by her, you know; to the extent of knocking Carberry down, if necessary. Then she goes to town and gets married; and what can you do?"

"Such a proceeding would utterly ruin Mr. Beresford. I have but to take legal steps to prove——"

"Don't forget this is September, and your authority ceases in May."

"It would ruin him all the same."

"My good Aunt, I know you better than you know yourself. You're not vindictive; you'll never try to injure Claud Beresford, just because you are annoyed. Besides, the world will side with the winning side, as every one knows. It's a bad match, no doubt, but you cannot prevent it, and you'll consult your own dignity best by giving in with a good grace."

My Lady consulted her dignity by feigning to consider.

"Are you sure, Clarence, that I cannot take immediate steps, legally?"

Clarence was sorely tempted to say that he was sure. But he had made a vow to leave off deluding people, and having already transgressed once during this interview, he would not do it again.

"I am no lawyer," said he, "so I cannot say that I am certain. But this I do know: they can be married before a registrar by giving twenty-four hours' notice, and that once done, anything you could do would be both absurd and vindictive. Much better just say to Miss Fane, 'I'm awfully sorry you will persist in this marriage, but as you are determined and I'm fond of you, I won't run the risk of injuring you or your husband.' You know you're fond of her; why should you make her uncomfortable?"

"And you, Clarence?" she said, with unwonted softness.

"I'll ask Beresford to Minsterview to keep his residence. He's a glorious fellow; you'll find you can't help liking him. I've got quite fond of him."

She looked earnestly at him for a moment, and he said hurriedly—

"That's all over, Aunt Gundred. We won't refer to it, if you please."

"Well, my dear boy, I objected chiefly on your account. It shall be as you wish. Emily will be a dreadful loss to me—I wish she would have stayed quietly with me through the winter ; but let this tiresome young man come to Minsterview, as you propose, and they can be quietly married. As he is ill, I suppose they will be contented with that."

"More than contented—and so am I. I knew you would hear reason. Give me a kiss, Aunt Gundred ; you've always been the kindest of aunts to me."

He went to tell Emily of the success of his mission, and that impulsive young woman flew to her Aunt and thanked her far more warmly than she at all deserved.

Claud was by this time allowed to leave his darkened rooms, though with orders to wear a shade over his eyes. He could hardly believe Clarence when the latter, rushing into his bedroom at an untimely hour in the morning, desired him to get up and come to Fairminster to be married.

"Married !" exclaimed Claud, sitting up, only half awake. "What are you talking about ? and what brought you here at such an hour ?"

"Pretty way to receive a fellow ! I came up last night, and according to my computation it's very late. Sinful, I call it, to be in bed at half-past

seven" (half-past ten being the usual hour for the virtuous speaker's first appearance). "I came to bring you the news. Lady Le Mesurier is ready to say, 'Bless you, my children,' and you're to come home with me to put in your three weeks' residence."

Claud fell flat on his back and uttered a shout.

"Hugh! Hugh Vincent!"

In rushed Hugh, half-dressed.

"Hugh, are there any signs of insanity about this early visitor?"

"None at all. What on earth are you at?"

"You think him sane? Then I'm the happiest man in England; and you, Clarence, the most generous."

He held out his hand: a long silent grasp was all that testified outwardly to a good deal of feeling on both sides.

At Moorside, meantime, there was much to be done. Having once consented, Lady Le Mesurier had too genuine a love of managing not to get interested in the preparations; but the only thing Emily could be persuaded to care about was her wedding-dress. She wanted to look her best on that day, so that if Claud was not to see her much longer he might at least have a pretty picture of her in his memory. Some other things she bought, but there never was a bride who seemed to care

less about her trousseau, with that one exception. She drove over to Castle Dering to engage Lady Frances as her bridesmaid, and hearty were the congratulations of her friends there, particularly the old countess.

"My dear," she said, "you're a credit to our sex, and I'm proud of you. I'll give you a wedding present, Emily. Four years engaged; to a poor man; he may be blind; can't distinguish himself; and the girl is only in a greater hurry to marry him. It's refreshing, positively; and besides all this, you've fairly defeated our dear Gundred!" And the wicked old lady went off in an ecstasy of chuckles which nearly choked her.

The only serious drawback to Emily's happiness was that her dear Mammie and Mr. Darnell could not be present at her marriage, but I suspect Mrs. Darnell was rather thankful to be spared a meeting with Lady Le Mesurier. Claud Beresford stayed at Minsterview for the three weeks before the wedding, and those weeks were of untold value to Clarence. Good impulses and good feeling he had before, but they began now to harden into good principles; and if this were a time of trial to him, it was also a time to which he looked back with thankfulness as long as he lived.

At his own request, Sir Clarence gave the bride away. The Dean performed the ceremony; and

no accusing ghost appeared to frighten the little bride when she turned away from the Altar. Indeed, her short sight would have saved her from alarm, in any case. Rosa Eustace was there, having been carried over by her brothers, that she might see her friend married. Of all those who were present—from little Miss Spratt crying in a dark corner, to Lady Le Mesurier, resplendent in deep-blue silk, looking on from her own stately seat—there was not one who did not sincerely wish Mrs. Claud Beresford all happiness. She was not as beautiful a bride as poor Gwenevere had been, but then she looked so good; and as to Claud, with the only really handsome part of his face hidden by a green shade, no one thought of comparing him with Harold Atheling as far as looks went: but what a smile he had! and how his grave face lighted up when he raised the shade for one stolen moment, to take a look at his little wife.

They went abroad at once, and remained absent until the following spring. In spite of the tenderest care and the best advice, Claud's sight grew gradually worse. His health recovered, his spirits were even, and, if he might be believed, Emily was better to him than eyes; but, alas! the disease went on unchecked. In about six months after his marriage the pain began to abate, and his sight, now little more than a perception of the light, and an un-

certain glimpse of any very brilliant colour, ceased to grow worse ; but it did not improve. They came to England in June, and to London, as Claud wished to see Mr. Fitzhenry, and to ask him the plain question—was his case hopeless? And the reply was, that though recovery was not actually impossible, it was very unlikely. Extreme care, too, was needed to prevent constant suffering, not unattended by danger. Mr. Fitzhenry ended by turning to Emily.

"Mr. Beresford hears his sentence very calmly, Madam ; he was not so cheerful when I saw him last year. It is a great compliment to you."

"It is her doing," Claud answered, laying his strong hand upon her slight shoulder. "I thought then that you were condemning me to a useless life, and perhaps a lonely one ; but my good fairy never lets me be either the one or the other."

Emily turned her sweet face towards him ; it was covered with tears which he could not see, but her voice, which he could hear, was cheerful and steady.

"You will be just as useful, my dear, as if we had two good pairs of eyes like other people, instead of one very bad pair between us."

"Your sight will improve, Mrs. Beresford," said the oculist. "At forty you will probably see better than you ever did."

"Forty?" said Claud, wistfully; "I wonder what my little firefly will look like then!"

That evening this couple had a great consultation about their future proceedings; which ended in a determination to take a house with a few fields, as near London as possible. Here Claud could be much in the air, and yet it would be possible for him to go to town when asked to preach; for, to his unspeakable thankfulness, he found that preaching was still possible to him. Emily soon found the very place she was dreaming of; a pretty house with a good garden, and three small fields. It bore the name of "Odessa," which she pronounced hideous, and promptly changed for "Silverton." A few weeks must elapse before they could take possession of their new abode, and these they devoted to paying visits. First to the dear old Silverton, where they found a few changes; for old Mr. Vincent was dead, and Maria was married. Thus Hugh was alone; but Emily soon perceived that he did not mean to remain alone. There was a Miss Susan Morland, the daughter of a neighbouring Rector—a sensible, good girl, just the girl to make a good mistress for a house like Meadowlands. Hugh confided his intentions to Emily before she left Silverton. "I'm so lonely—*too* lonely," he said, "and she is a good girl, and of an active, practical turn of mind. She likes to

have plenty to do, and I hope she will be happy."

"And you, Hugh! don't marry her unless you care for her—unless it will make you happy too."

"Happy? Well, Emily, I dare say I shall be happy if it turns out well. I like Susan, and I believe she likes me, and I want a wife. I can go no further than this, Emily."

Emily was rather horrified, but Claud persuaded her not to remonstrate. Very soon it was known that the marriage was to be; but Emily never mentioned it in writing to Gwenvere—in fact, she never yet had mentioned Hugh's name.

From Silverton the Beresfords went to Moorside, where Lady Le Mesurier made herself most agreeable to Claud, and took quite a fancy to him. While they were still with her, a novel, written while they were travelling about, came out, and made quite a sensation. "By a Clergyman," was the only clue given to the authorship, for Claud did not wish it to owe any success it might have to his fame as a poet. Emily had a copy, of course, and every one at Fairminster read it. One set of people pronounced it too thoughtful for a novel; and another set said it was a book which no Clergyman ought to have written; while a third set declared that, from the tone of the book on Church questions, it was plain that the Author was

a Jesuit at heart, if not openly. The rest of the world contented themselves with ascribing it by turns to every writer of the day. Sir Clarence read it, and said the book was a fine book if a fellow only knew what it was all about. Lady Le Mesurier said the sentiments were overstrained. Finally, Dean Eustace declared that it was by the author of the "Modern Dives;" whereupon Emily confessed that he was right, and every one had to read the book again to see what they thought of it in this new light.

"I'll tell you a secret, Claud," said Emily, as the pair took their journey to London when the new Silverton was ready for them. "We shall hear something about Clarence and Lady Frances soon. I don't think Aunt Gundred likes it."

"I like Lady Frances," answered Claud; "but as to Le Mesurier, there is only one woman of my acquaintance good enough for him."

"And who is that, pray?"

"He can't have her, my dear; so I hope he may fancy Lady Frances."





CHAPTER XXI.

GWENEVERE.



FIVE quiet years have passed since Emily and Claud Beresford settled themselves at "Silverton-on-Thames," as Claud declared it ought to be called. Five years, which have brought with them both happiness and sorrow, as it is the nature of years to do, after the first sunny twenty, which generally—God be praised for it!—bring joy only. For the happiness;—Claud's health has been good; he has not suffered often from attacks of pain and inflammation in the eyes, and he has as much work as he can do, both as a writer and a preacher. It is touching to see the tall, strong man, with the green shade over his almost sightless eyes, dependent upon others to reach his proper place in reading-desk or pulpit, yet swaying the hearts of the hearers by the magic of his voice, and the earnest

tenderness of his manner. Touching to hear him say or sing his portion of the service, with barely a pause sometimes for recollection ; and to hear, too, the vivid pictures of natural beauty which sometimes form part of his sermons—beauty which he may never see again. But to go on with my list of joys. There is a sturdy, four-year-old boy at Silverton, and a baby girl, and Emily is never weary of describing them to Claud. Then, Sir Clarence has fulfilled her prophecy, and married Lady Frances Dering ; and Aunt Gundred is very friendly, and pays Silverton a long, pleasant visit occasionally, making herself very delightful. Also, Hugh Vincent's unromantic marriage has turned out better than Emily expected ; and he is fast developing into a stout, healthy, energetic farmer, very fond of his cheerful wife and his four fine boys, but with a soft corner in his heart for little Ethel Winthorp, who has long since forgotten her fear of him, and whose pretty face reminds him of Gwennie as she looked in her childhood. Mr. and Mrs. Darnell, too, are flourishing. A cousin has left Mr. Darnell a legacy, which makes them very comfortable ; and Ethel is now their own adopted daughter, Emily being released from her obligations on her account.

Then as to sorrows. Claud's blindness is a lasting one to Emily, though no one on earth knows

that, save herself. Then one little baby was taken from them—a lovely little girl. And lastly, Emily's faithful heart is not at ease about Gwenevere. These two have always corresponded, but of late Gwenevere's letters have been few, and they never were satisfactory. Emily says poor Gwen never was a good letter-writer, but does not say how the tone of the letters grieves her, she hardly knows how. However, she will soon know better what life has made of poor Gwenevere; for old Mr. Atheling of Saxelby has been dead now for nearly two years; Saxelby has been thoroughly fitted up anew, and Colonel Atheling is coming home to live there, but he cannot leave India for some months yet. Therefore, it is a surprise to Emily to receive a letter from Gwenevere, written from Southampton, and asking if she may come to Silvertown with her two children, as she had been obliged to come to England without Harold on account of her health, and to see Emily is the only pleasure to which she looks forward.

"Claud, I fear it will put you out, but I don't see how we can refuse; and, besides, I do so long to see Gwennie."

"Of course she must come, my dear. I only wish that fat boy of yours was old enough to write for me when you are occupied with her."

"Claud! if I ever catch any one but myself

writing for you, there will be murder to talk about ; ay, even if it was little Clarry. I can manage, never fear."

So Gwenevere was to come. Her rooms were made ready, and the hour fixed for her arrival. Emily drove her little pony-carriage to the nearest station, as it was a beautifully fine day. It was Midsummer Day, so it had every right to be warm, and warm it undoubtedly was. A hired brougham was also in attendance, and a cart for the luggage. Having found a boy to hold her pony, Emily went up on the platform to wait ; and for the first time it struck her that Gwenevere spoke of only two children, whereas she certainly had three. Here was the train, however, so there was no time for speculation on that head. She walked along the line of carriages, looking in. In one, there was a terrible screaming going on, and in that carriage she caught sight of dusky faces and white clothes ; so she opened the door and looked in. Oh no ; certainly *that* was not Gwennie. She said, "I beg your pardon," and was turning away, when the faded, discontented face lighted up, and the lady, who was "certainly not Gwennie," called to her.

"Emily ! don't you know me ?"

Emily sprang in. As she did so the screaming ceased. She pounced upon Gwennie with all her old vehemence. Gwenevere began to cry. Emily

followed her example ; and the child who had been screaming, screamed again. In the midst of the fuss, a porter's voice was heard.

“ Now then, Ma'am,—are you going on ? ”

“ No ; please wait a moment,” cried Emily, darting out. “ Come out, Gwen. Oh, how like Harold that girl is ! Come out, my child. Gwennie, tell the servants to get out, or they'll be carried off. Where's the luggage ? ”

“ Gascoigne will see to that,” answered Gwenevere.

In five minutes the train was gone, and they were the only people on the platform. A little way off lay an immense pile of luggage, and beside it stood Gascoigne, whose attitude proved him to be, or to have been, a soldier.

“ I thought you would come with me, Gwen, in the pony-carriage, and the children and servants can go in the brougham.”

“ I shall go in this little carriage,” remarked the little girl—a child of about seven years old, and the very image of her father. And into the pony-carriage she forthwith sprang. •

“ Oh no, Eda dear, no,” said Gwenevere. “ Get out, like a darling, and go with Ayesha in the brougham. I want to talk to you, Emily ; I wish she would go in the brougham.”

“ Why, of course she will,” said Emily, springing

gaily into the phaeton and lifting Eda out. "Here, take her, please," addressing the dusky Ayah and Bearer, who grinned and showed flashing white teeth, but declined to receive Miss Eda in their arms, to Emily's considerable surprise. With some difficulty she set her on the ground, saying—

"Run, my dear ; get into the other carriage and make haste to get home, for I am sure you are tired."

Gwenevere got into the phaeton, and said, "Drive on, Emily ; let the servants settle it ;" and they drove.

Emily glanced back, and saw Eda standing just where she had left her. A turn in the road prevented her seeing the end of the affair.

"You did not know me, Emily. I thought you would not."

"You look very delicate," said Emily. "But this is such a healthy place ; we shall soon have you looking like yourself again."

"Ah ! no, Emily. How well you look ; hardly older than when we parted. One would know that you had never had a sorrow."

"Oh, Gwennie ! indeed I have had sorrows ; I would have said, more sorrows than you have. Poor Claud, you know ; and I lost my little baby, and——"

"Emily, those are not the sorrows that try one," said Gwennie. "It is worry, I think, more than

sorrow, that makes one old. I have been so unhappy. I have never known what peace or happiness means."

"You did not tell me in your letters that you were unhappy."

"No ; writing things is a comfort to some people, I believe, but it never could be a comfort to me. Oh, is this Silverton ? What a pretty approach !"

"Yes, this is Silverton. Thank you, Mrs. Smith. Leave the gate open, for the brougham must be just behind us. Here is the house ; you don't see our best view from this side."

"And where is Claud ?"

"We shall find him on the terrace ; at least, I left him there."

A servant came and took charge of the pony, and Emily led her guest through the hall, into a room which might be called a hall too, though it was furnished as a sitting-room. On one side were the stairs, and the sitting-rooms opened into it ; but a large French window, opening upon a covered terrace, made it a delightful summer-room. Outside, on the terrace, was Claud ; and with him his little boy. Claud came to the window, the child holding his hand and watching his steps carefully.

"Wait, Pappy, wait ; Baby Gwen has left dolly on de f'oor ! Clarry put it away."

Dolly was put aside.

"Baby Gwen evvy tareless," said Clarry, solemnly.
"You's at de 'tep, Pappy."

"Good boy. Ah, Gwennie, is this you? You're welcome to Silverton-on-Thames. Have you your children here?"

"No, they are following. Oh, Claud! I am so sorry to see you like this; it is dreadful—dreadful!" And, letting herself sink into a chair, Gweneverere began to cry.

"My dear Gwennie, we have long left off lamenting ourselves; haven't we, Emily? I'm always afraid to grumble, because I have so many blessings that might be taken from me if I growl about the one withheld."

"Oh, but it *is* so sad," said Gweneverere. "That lovely little boy—to think that you never saw him!"

"Gwennie," said Emily, hastily, "I want you to look at Clarence. Come here, Clarry."

"P'ease no, Mamma. Lady naughty; she kyin' for nuffing."

"But you must come when you're called," said Emily. "Come here, you little rogue, and kiss Aunt Gwennie. I think we had better be Aunts, Gwen; don't you? Kiss Aunt Gwen, Clarry."

"Aunt Gweneverere," said Gwennie; "Harold will never let me be called by the dear old pet names."

Clarry's kiss was hardly given when sounds in the outer hall made known the arrival of the rest of the party.

"Here are the children," said Gwenevere. "No more peace and quiet now. However, Egbert has stopped crying; that is one comfort."

Emily went to the door and opened it.

"Come in here, Eda. Come, little Egbert, I have hardly looked at you yet."

Egbert was almost a baby—a fat, solemn-looking child, very backward in speaking and walking. Eda, on the contrary, was a most precocious-looking damsel, with hard, observant eyes, and a slight frown perpetually appearing on her pretty white forehead. She pushed rudely past Emily, went over to her mother, standing before her with a scowling face.

"Why did you leave me to come with the servants? I wanted to go in the little carriage, and you knew I did."

"Your Aunt Emily drove off, my dear, and there was not room for you."

"You told her, for I heard you. You said, 'Drive on, Emily;' and you could have gone in the big carriage yourself. And she's not my Aunt, is she?"

"But I wanted to talk to her; and you are to

call her Aunt Emily, my dear. I have not seen her for years, you know, and——"

"I don't care! You told her to drive on, and I heard you!"

The astonishment with which this conversation was listened to may be imagined. Little Clarry opened his dark eyes as wide as they would go, and said, "Oh, fie!" in a tone of reprehension. Emily rang a bell, and a pleasant-looking young woman made her appearance, carrying Baby Gwen—a fair, dimpled creature, who laughed comfortably when she saw her mother; hid her face as well as she could with two small hands, and laughed again, when she saw the strangers.

"Maggie, will you show Mrs. Atheling's nurse the way to the nurseries, please? Take Master Clarence with you, and leave Baby with me."

"Was me naughty, Mamma?" whispered Clarry.

"No, dear; but I do not want you just now."

"No, I t'ought it was uzzer people was naughty," remarked Clarry severely, as he followed Maggie from the room.

"Do your servants speak English, Gwen?"

"Yes, all of them. Go, Eda; follow the servant, my dear."

"I mean to stay here," replied Eda, seating herself.

Gwenevere made no reply, so there the child sat in sulky silence, watching all that was done,

and listening to every word that was said, in a way that disturbed Emily at first, but after a time she forgot that the girl was there. As to Claud, he had no idea (being used to his wife's brisk way of doing things) but that Miss Eda had been summarily expelled the apartment.

"Will you come to your room, Gwen, or will you stay here until luncheon is ready?"

"I will stay here, if you don't mind. I am quite tired."

"Let me take off your hat and jacket, then. Lie down on this sofa; it is a most cosy one. Dear Gwen! it is like old times to hear your voice," went on Emily, as she put a shawl over her feet and arranged the pillows comfortably.

"It is like old times to be cared for, Emily. Thank you, dear. I am perfectly comfortable now. What a darling your baby is!"

Renewed chuckles from Baby Gwen, who indeed was one of those delightful babies who seem to be so full of laugh that a mere touch sets them going.

"Your namesake, Gwen. Claud, where are you going? Wait a moment."

She gathered up some wraps which had fallen, pushed a chair back into its place, and said—

"Now all is right. You see, Gwennie, we have to keep everything in its proper place."

"I'm only going to my own chair," said Claud;

"unless, indeed, you two want to have a private talk. If so, say the word, Emily."

"Oh no, don't go, Claud," said Emily, who was quite happy when he was absent from her.

"Gwen, why have you not brought Harold—your boy, I mean—with you?"

"He is still in India," answered Gwenevere, her eyes filling with tears.

"Still in India?" repeated Emily, not knowing exactly what to say.

"Oh, Emily, you will never know what a life mine has been," Gwenevere went on, in a low, complaining voice. Her voice was perhaps more changed than her face; it had been peculiarly full and sweet, and now it was thin, toneless, and querulous. "I do so love my boy! He is my favourite and darling; and surely it was enough to be parted from him, without being told that it was to prevent my ruining him, as I have ruined Eda. And I did not ruin Eda; it was the servants. You see I had to leave her so much with them, and those Indian servants are perfectly dreadful. I detest them! I never *have* become used to them."

"The boy is with his father, then?"

"Yes; and oh, Harold is so severe with him. I am afraid my darling's spirit will be broken."

"But, Gwen dear——"

"Emily, don't call me Gwen. I like it, for it

reminds me of old times ; but if you *could* accustom yourself to say Gwenevere—for Harold gets so *pleasant* about it. He won't say anything to you, of course, but he will to me ; and you know he will be home in November, if not before."

A bell sounded.

"There is luncheon ready. Will you come in, Gwen—Gwenevere, or shall I bring you some here ? Clarry dines at our luncheon, and I suppose Eda and Egbert will do the same."

"I shan't," answered Eda for herself. "I mean to dine late, thank you."

Emily started.

"I had forgotten the child altogether," said she ; "and I think, Eda, that this is a question for Mamma to decide."

Eda uttered a short laugh, and Gwenevere said—

"Oh no, Emily ! Eda is a very self-willed child ; and I cannot wonder that she disobeys me, because she never sees any consideration shown for me."

"But," said Emily, quietly, "it would not be convenient to me to have Eda dining late. So you had better eat your dinner now, Eda. Will you come, Gwenevere ? Perhaps you will be more rested if you stay here."

"I think so. And when you are coming back, bring me a biscuit of something ; I am not in the least hungry."

Eda followed Claud and Emily into the dining-room. In a moment more they were joined by Margaret with Clarry, and Ayesha with Egbert. Clarry was perched upon his own high long-legged chair, and there was not a second for Egbert, who therefore raised a dismal cry and pointed at the high seat in apparent anguish of spirit.

"'Tittle boy want dis chair," says Clarry. "Put me down, Mag. He's de wis'tor and *myss* have it."

Baby Gwen was carried off by Maggie, and the rest sat down to table.

"What's this?" said Eda, when the servant laid her plate before her.

"Roast mutton, Miss," answered the girl.

"Take it away. I will have some of *that*—" pointing to a small dish of veal-patties. Emily was rather inclined to fight it out, but reflected that the girl's manner was no business of hers. So she helped her to a patty, privately hoping that it might prove too highly peppered for her; but Eda ate it all quite comfortably.

"I will have another," said she. There was but one left, and apparently thinking that it might be refused her on that account, she stretched out her hand and carried it off on her own fork.

Clarry stared, as well he might. "Evvy tweer 'tittle girl," said he, meditatively.

Presently Claud asked for another patty, and Eda

burst into a laugh which made Emily long to box her ears. Egbert would not eat at all, and threw his spoon at the Ayah.

"Eda," said Emily in a very decided tone, when they rose from the table, "you are to go to the nursery now. You will find some nice toys and books there—but you really must go."

"Because Mamma wants to talk about Papa," replied Eda. "I shall *not* go. I don't care for toys, and it amuses me to hear people talk."

She followed them back into the hall. Claud sat down again and kept up a conversation about nothing in particular until Gwenevere had eaten some luncheon, then he stood up and said—

"Emily, take Gwenevere to your morning-room, and make her rest thoroughly. Give me my pencil and note-book, my dear. Thank you. I shall take a walk up and down the terrace, for you won't care to leave Gwennie to-day; to-morrow we must show her our domain. Come to me before dinner."

Emily perceived that he hoped by this device to relieve her of Miss Eda's company, so she promptly obeyed him. Eda was left sitting alone in the hall.

But Gwenevere was hardly made comfortable before she started up again, crying—

"Where is Eda?"

"I think she remained in the hall. Do you want her?"

"No; oh no, but—where is Claud?"

"Walking on the terrace, just outside the hall window."

"Emily, did Eda look angry?"

"I declare I did not remark her. Lie down again, Gwennie dear; you are not resting yourself, and you *do* look so tired."

"But I must see what Eda is about," said Gweneverë, rising and opening the door. Emily followed. They found Eda standing in the open glass door, watching Claud, who was walking up and down with a note-book in his hand. The girl laughed when she saw her mother; and Gweneverë's worn face betrayed such relief that for the first time it flashed upon Emily's mind that she had feared that Eda might have employed herself in playing some practical joke upon Claud. She felt quite ill for the moment.

"Eda, what are you doing?" began Gweneverë. "I wish you would go to the nursery."

"But I shan't," remarked Eda.

"But you shall," said Emily, her wrath suddenly getting the better of her. The girl was a slight creature, and Emily felt as strong as Samson in her fear for Claud. She made a dexterous pounce, caught the child so as to keep her arms down by her side, and lifting her from the ground, she carried her off towards the door.



CAREY AND HERSELF ON THE SOFA AND BURST INTO TEARS.

"Open the door for me, Gwennie."

Gwenevere obeyed. Eda never struggled. "I'll go," said she, sullenly; "put me down, and I'll walk."

Emily set her down, took her by the hand, and led her off towards the nursery. No sooner was the door opened, than with one glance round, as if to select a victim, she flew at the Ayah and boxed her ears, then seized the poker and deliberately smashed some little china figures that stood on the mantelpiece. Emily stood aghast.

"Now, will you interfere with me again?" said Eda.

Gwenevere drew Emily out of the room. In silence they both returned to the morning-room. Gwenevere threw herself on the sofa and burst into tears.

"Oh, Emily, I am surely the most unhappy woman in the world! What have I done, that I should be so afflicted? My husband despises and distrusts me, my children are no comfort to me. You see what a temper Eda has; and my beautiful Harold, who loves me—the only creature who does love me—his father says shall never be left with me again because I shall spoil him like Eda. And I did not spoil Eda; it was those horrid natives."

"But, Gwennie dear, why do you not assert your authority a little more? Eda does not seem to have the slightest notion of obedience."

"No ; how should she ? I used to try, Emily. I began when Eda was the baby, and I tried to make her good. I remembered how happy we used to be, and I tried—I did really. And then Harold would not have it. He said I must attend to the duties of my station, and not shut myself up with the child ; and when I said no one else could teach the child to be a Christian he laughed, and said he didn't want his child to be made a hypocrite, and that my religion did not seem to have done me much good. So he made me leave her with the native servants ; and now, because she is naughty, he says it is my fault. Now I ask you, Emily, is that reasonable ?"

"Perhaps something had vexed him," answered Emily.

"No, that's his usual way of speaking to me. He never cares what he says. One day Harold was disobedient, and Colonel Atheling told me I ought to make the boy respect me ; so I just said, 'How can he, when he hears the way you speak to me ?' and he only laughed."

"Well, dear, lie down again and get a little rest."

"But it does me good to talk to you."

"You see," said Emily, doubtfully, "I am not sure that it is right."

"Oh, Emily ! how can you have the heart to say

that? For months I have been looking forward to telling you all my trials, and getting real sympathy at last. Why, I really could have waited for Harold, only I was determined to have a quiet time with you."

"If you think I can help or advise you——"

"No, you cannot. No one can help me; and as to advice, what advice can do any good when it is not my own fault at all? If I had not really done my best, I should not complain."

What could Emily say? She felt very unhappy; but Gwenevere talked on and on, until at last Patty appeared to say that the Master wanted Mrs. Beresford, and Emily left her to take Gwenevere to her room and help her to dress.

She found Claud still on the terrace; his face brightened, as it always did when he heard her step. Emily never knew how sad he sometimes looked, for he never looked sad when she was with him.

"Oh, Claud!" creeping up to him, and laying her head on his shoulder.

"Why, you are crying, my darling. What is it? Is it about poor Gwennie?"

"She is so unhappy; but oh, that is not all. To see her so changed! She seems to have no energy to do right—even to keep her own heart right, you know. No one, to hear her speak, would ever

think that she once was—what we know she was."

"My dear child, we are not to judge. I don't wonder you feel it, Emily. • It must be sad to see one who 'did run well,' and who seems to have ceased to run at all. But it has not been a sudden thing. This want of home peace is the natural outcome of her conduct about her marriage. What peace could she expect?" •

"It is of Harold's want of confidence that she complains chiefly."

"What confidence could he have in her? I am not justifying him, for surely it was his own work. But now we have the poor thing for a few quiet weeks, let us see what old associations will do for her."

"Old associations! She asked me if Hugh ever came here, for that if she met him Harold would be angry. I said Hugh was married, and she said in a queer, half-vexed way, 'Oh, he got over it, did he?' and then went off into a long story of the injury he had done her by rousing Harold's jealousy by appearing in the Cathedral—'and it was so cruel and selfish of Hugh;' and she did not even ask me who he married."

"Poor thing! she was always selfish," said Claud.

"Gwennie selfish. Oh no, Claud; not at Silverton."

"I always thought her so ; but I'm not going to say a word against the poor soul. I pity her from my heart, and we must try to help her."

"Yes, we must try. But, Claud dear, I want you always to take your stick with you and feel carefully, unless I am with you, for I am really afraid of that little Eda." And she told him what had happened.

"I will be careful. What is her name,—Edith?"

"No ; Gundreda. Gwennie dislikes the name, and so Harold——"

"Emily, my dear, don't take that tone ; if you do, you will be of no use to Gwenevere. She ought not to speak in that way of her husband, and you will best check her by refusing to echo it."

"I will. You are quite right. Come, dear, it is time to dress. Oh, Claud ! I am so tired."

"You have been worried ; your dinner will restore you to a more cheerful state of mind. By the way, I hope Miss Eda will stay in the nursery. Gwenevere will never have a moment's peace, until she makes that monkey obey her."

A more thoroughly uncomfortable time than that which the Beresfords endured while Gwenevere and her children were with them, they never remembered. Emily actually grew thin, she was so harassed and worried. Gwenevere never was satis-

fied except when, alone with Emily, she lay upon a sofa and poured forth lamentations over her hard lot, dwelling upon the cruel injustice of the world in general and Harold in particular, and her own blameless conduct. If Emily listened in silence, she was accused of being unsympathizing; if she spoke, she was blamed for "not taking a kind view" of Gwenevere's troubles. And all the time she was thus victimized, the poor thing was in an agony of fear about Claud. He, not caring to add to her distress, complained as little as possible, but he was very nearly driven wild by the imp-like proceedings of Eda Atheling, who would escape from the servants, establish herself wherever he might happen to be, and then make him aware of her presence by rustling about among his papers, displacing the furniture, and laughing at his vain endeavours to make her behave herself. If he took refuge in the morning-room, Gwenevere became silent and restless. She complained frequently of the dulness of the life—the life which they had always found so pleasant. Between mother and daughter, Emily did not know what to do. Eda was a cruel child. Little Clarry nearly cried himself into fits one day, declaring that "Tuzzin Eda was evvy 'icked, and God *couldn't* love her—she was so bad to the poo' fitty fly." But he never could bring himself to say what the little wretch had done to the fly. It was

a relief to all parties when, in November, Colonel Atheling came home. He would not come to stay at Silverton, but carried off his wife and children at once. Emily thought he was not in the least altered, except that the little frown was now habitual. When they were gone, Emily sorrowfully said to her husband that she feared the visit had done no good to any one. "Though I followed your advice, Claud—I tried very hard."

"You did, my dear. And now, let us pray for poor Gwennie. That's all we can do for her now."

The next news that reached them about the Athelings (for Gwenevere did not write regularly now) came from Lady Le Mesurier, who came to Silverton from Saxelby. She declared that her visit had been delightful; but Emily observed that she avoided the subject as much as she could. Until, when she was leaving them, she suddenly and unexpectedly said—

"Emily, you are very generous not to triumph over me. I would give ten years of my life not to have had a part in bringing about Gwenevere's marriage."

"There is no use in talking about it," answered Emily.

No invitation to Saxelby reached the Beresfords, and when Gwenevere came to town for the season, she paid them one or two hurried visits, and that

was all. Emily went to see her, but it was very unsatisfactory, and she did not go often. Her loving heart yearned over Gwennie, but there seemed to be a stone wall between them.

Time went on. Every year, which brought peace and happiness to the family at Silverton, seemed to bring added care and discontent to Gwenevere. She still held aloof from all her old friends. She had never made an effort to see the Darnells. She sank into a fanciful state of nerves at last, thinking of nothing but her own sufferings, which her family declined to believe in.

About four years had passed thus, when one morning Emily was surprised by the arrival of Colonel Atheling. He asked to see her alone, and said to her—

"Gwenevere sent me to you. I cannot but feel that it is very unreasonable, but I could not refuse her. Will you come to her, Emily? She is very ill."

"Worse than usual? I had not heard of it."

"She is *really* very ill. You know Gundreda is at school now, and Egbert ~~went~~ ^{was} this year also; so there was no one at home to perceive it. I fear her ill health has been more real than I believed it. She fainted at dinner the other day, and has been in a sinking state ever since. Indeed, Emily, she is very ill, and she says no one can give her any comfort but you."

"I must speak to Claud, and then I shall be ready."

Claud consented, of course ; little Clarry promising to take "no end" of care of Papa. But Emily little thought how long she would be absent from her house, nor yet through what painful scenes she was to pass before she saw it again. For Gwenevere was dying, and her misery was most terrible to witness,—too terrible to dwell upon in the pages of a tale like this ; particularly at the end, when one wishes to leave a cheerful impression upon the reader's mind. It is enough to say that now, at last, Gwenevere's eyes were opened ; at last, she ceased to blame everybody but herself, and to rail at her evil fortune instead of trying to amend. For amendment now there was no time ; but repentance, deep and agonized, and, we may hope, true, was vouchsafed her. Mr. and Mrs. Darnell, forgiving her long neglect, came to her aid now ; and from the lips of her earliest teachers Gwenevere heard again the words of hope. For years she had, as Emily discovered with horror, ceased to be a Communicant ; she had been too well taught to venture unprepared, and she had not dared to search her heart ; and now she shrank from the Holy Rite, feeling her own unworthiness. But she yielded at last to Mr. Darnell's pleading ; and, having done so, she seemed to find peace. She

died, and there was a trembling hope in the true hearts that loved her.

"But oh, Claud!" Emily said, when the children had gone to bed on the night of her return, "to think of what Gwennie was, and what a sad, sad life hers has been. To die at thirty-three, and to leave no trace of influence for good on those she loved. Not on one of them, Claud. Not one of them even seemed to care very much that she was gone."

"It was truly a sad life, my dear; but let us be thankful that we have hope for her. And for the others, we must do as we did for Gwennie—pray, and wait."

But the "leal heart" was not "light" again for many a long day, and as long as she lives will Emily mourn for the friend and companion of her childhood.

But a brightness dawned upon Silverton some time after Gwenever's death—a brightness for which even Emily had ceased to hope. Claud's sight began to improve.

It was at first so slight a change that he would not speak of it, half believing that it was fancy. At last he was so certain that he saw more clearly that he ventured to mention it to Emily, and found that she had observed the improvement, but, like himself, had not dared to believe in it. However,

from that time he has steadily improved, and there seems now to be reason to hope that, with great care, they may yet "make up one tolerable pair of eyes between them," to use his own expression. The first time he got a really good look at his wife, he declared she was prettier than when he saw her last—on his wedding-day!

For this great blessing Emily is so thankful, that her cheerfulness is quite restored; and there are few women in England happier than she is.

What is the Moral of this story? I leave the reader to say; but I hope the said reader, particularly if she is a young girl with her life before her, will consider the question, and with God's help so live, that she may have no sin like Gwenevere's for which to answer, either in this world or the next.

THE END.

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